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THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.

✓ BY

JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.,

Minister of the City Temple, Holborn Viaduct, London.

AUTHOR OF "ECCE DEUS," "THE PARACLETE," "THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST,"
"SPRINGDALE ABBEY," "THE INNER LIFE OF CHRIST," "AD CLERUM,"
"THE ARK OF GOD," "APOSTOLIC LIFE," "TYNE CHYLDE," ETC.

VOL. I.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS.



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I INSCRIBE THIS VOLUME
TO
THE REV. WILLIAM TYLER,
IN FRATERNAL RECOGNITION OF
Fifty Years'
CONTINUED MINISTRY IN LONDON,
MARKED BY
EXTRAORDINARY MENTAL ENERGY,
AND BY STILL MORE
EXTRAORDINARY SPIRITUAL RESULTS.

PREFACE.

THIS is not a Bible Commentary in the usual sense of that term. It is a pastor's commentary upon such portions of Holy Scripture as are of obvious and immediate importance to the growth of the soul in Divine wisdom, and is, therefore, not intended to take the place of the verbal and critical commentaries which so ably represent the latest phases of Christian erudition. Instead of going minutely through any book verse by verse, the first object will be to discover its governing idea or principal purpose, and to make that clear by taking out of the book, say twelve, twenty, or thirty instances most strikingly illustrative of the writer's intention.) For example, some such order as the following (always held to be variable of course) may be adopted :—

GENESIS: A book of *Beginnings*: the beginning of Creation; the beginning of Humanity; the beginning of Family life; the beginning of Disobedience; a kind of daybreak book; a wondrous dawn; an hour of revelation and vision. To get hold of *this* idea is to get a thorough insight into the book of Genesis.

EXODUS: Phases of *Providence*: in leadership, in national deliverances, in organisation, in codified human life, in all the mystery of human training and discipline, showing how the tabernacle of God is with men upon earth: a refuge, a judgment, a symbol. To master *this* idea is to seize the very spirit of the book of Exodus.

LEVITICUS: Religious *Mechanics*: the Mechanics of Sin-reckoning; the Mechanics of Sacrifice; the Mechanics of Intercession; the Mechanics of Purification; the higher meaning of all these intricate and costly formalities; the unprofitableness of bodily exercise; the revelation and development of true Sacrifice.

So with all the other books. We must discover the genius or purpose of each book, and elucidate and magnify it by the strongest illustrative instances. As for detail, it is abundantly and satisfactorily treated in critical commentaries devoted to the study of language, custom, antiquity, and science. The purpose of the People's Bible is pastoral; it aims so to bring all readers under the moral sovereignty of the sacred Book as to arm them against temptation, enrich them with solid comfort, and fortify them with the wisdom of God.

We assume an immense responsibility in claiming that any book is a final and authoritative standard in faith and morals. We place the book itself in an awful position. We separate it from all other books; we make sceptical criticism a profane offence, and devout obedience an essential element of spiritual character. The mind has simply to receive, the will has simply to obey, the heart has simply to trust. The book is to us verily as God himself. Are we, in nineteenth-century light, to stand by such a position, or to abandon it? Is the Bible still to stand alone, and to demand the obeisance of all other books; is the dream-book to stand in the harvest-fields of literature and to receive the homage of the bending sheaves? In reply, I would rather avail myself of the limited responsibility of a personal testimony, than even appear to involve others by the use of terms often difficult or impossible to fix in rigid definition. At the risk of a verbal paradox, I will embolden myself to say that the older I grow the more inspired the Bible seems to become. You know my meaning. The book enlarges like a heightening sky. You also know my meaning when I say that there is only one book in the world which can prove the inspiration of the Bible, and that is the Bible itself. Possibly in our early reading of the Scriptures we put ourselves into a false relation to the book by taking with us some preconceived notion or theory of inspiration, and trying to make the Bible exactly

fit our mechanical orthodoxy. This was like timing the sun by our chronometers, instead of timing our chronometers by the sun. What wonder if we have lost much by this process? What wonder if the supposed orthodoxy has originated the real scepticism? Inspiration, like its Author, is a term which has no equivalent in other words, and therefore can have no complete theory. Strange as it may appear, there are some words which lexicography cannot break up into explanatory syllables, and amongst them the word *Inspiration* holds a foremost place. We must *feel* some meanings, as blind men feel the morning light. Illustrations of inspiration we can have; also reverent suggestions respecting it; also such confirmations as arise from coincidence, unity, purpose, and issue,—here, indeed, is the most inviting and productive field of devout and even intellectual research; but to say authoritatively where Inspiration begins, where it ends, how it operates, what it involves, where it separates itself from genius, how it burned for brief day in shepherd or king, fisherman or tentmaker, and then was withdrawn to heaven, nevermore to glow upon earth, would be to have the very inspiration which is said to have completed itself in revelation. The Bible addresses every aspect and every necessity of my nature; it is my own biography; I seem to have read it in some other world; we are old friends; the breathing of Eternity is in us both, and we have happened together, to our mutual joy, on this rough shore of time. I never know how great a Book it is until I try to do without it, then the heart aches; then the eyes are put out with the great tears of grief; then the house is no home of mine; then life sinks under an infinite load of weariness. In great moods of moral exultation I cannot stoop to the unworthy fray of intellectual encounter, to compare theories, to discuss contradictory scepticisms, and to institute comparisons between the cleverness which baffles me and the faith which impels me to service.

But has Inspiration really ceased out of the Church? Is the Holy Spirit but a term in ancient theology? Is he not the *abiding* Paraclete? Jesus Christ distinctly promised that the Paraclete should abide "for ever," and can he be in the heart without inspiring the whole range of the mind? I have no doubt as to the continuance of Inspiration in the Church, for it seems to me to be the one gift which must, of gracious necessity, abide for ever—the gift, indeed, without which the Church could not exist. But the gift is not always to be used in one direction. There are inspired *readers* as certainly as there are inspired writers. "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding," in the deep and true reading of the Word. I am not alarmed by the perils which must instantly suggest themselves to apprehensive minds, though some of those perils, viewed from unequal distances, are unquestionably portentous in outline. The gift of inspired reading is the gift of the whole believing and suppliant Church. There is no inspired *class* in the Church, Divinely marked off for special reverence and remuneration; indeed, it seems to me that the so-called priests are the *only* uninspired followers—the mere craftsmen and pensioners—of the Church; they are "shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter." "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind." You need not, therefore, fear that I am pointing to a priestly class. The kind of inspiration I mean can be had for the asking by all humble souls. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" The proof of such inspiration will be found less in intellectual splendour than in spiritual docility and child-like obedience; we shall be unconscious of the shining of our face, but shall know that in our hearts there is a great softness of love, a holy yearning after our

Father's perfectness ; we shall be most inspired when we are most teachable ; we may be sure that the purpose of the Holy Spirit is being accomplished within us when we say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," and ask him, beside whom are the two anointed ones, not to withhold his revelation from babe-like souls. Verily, Inspiration hath not ceased. Let us pray for an inspired ministry : in other words, that all ministers may be blessed with a double portion of the Holy Spirit. This is our protection against priestism. This will sanctify every man, body, soul, and spirit, and make the whole Church the living temple of the Holy Ghost. When ministers are Divinely inspired their public reading of the Scriptures will be an exposition ; every accent will be as a tongue of fire, and every emphasis will give new hints of meaning. The inspired writers wait for inspired readers. How the Holy Book leaps, so to say, in recognition of the sacred touch and the loving glance ! Inspired reading gives us a Bible which cannot be taken from us ; not a mechanical Bible, which cunning hands can disjoint ; not an artificial Bible, which relies upon scattered proof-texts ;—but a living revelation : a voice which awakens faithful echoes in the heart ; a self-attesting book ; its own mystery and its own lamp ; without beginning or end ; an infinite surprise : an infinite benediction. Have no fear that the Ark of the Testimony will be taken. We lose our inspiration when we lose our Faith, and then we are the subjects of irrational panic. Rather say, "Come up, ye horses ; and rage, ye chariots ; and let the mighty men come forth, . . . for Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is but a noise." Theories and dogmas, propositions and controversies, orthodoxies and heterodoxies, come and go, but the Word of the Lord abideth for ever, "surely as Tabor is among the mountains, and as Carmel by the sea."

One word as to the highest qualification alike of a commentator and a reader. I have the more confidence in pointing out this qualification, for the reason that the

profoundest of Biblical scholars will be the first to maintain its supremacy. Without that qualification we must for ever stand as strangers outside the Bible, but with it the soul may speak, as it were, face to face with God. The critical expositor has his well-defined field of service, within whose lines he can render incalculable help to the cause of Christ, yet this wide field rather increases than diminishes the area within which the meek and lowly spirit, the broken and humble heart, can read the deepest meaning of the Divine word. With a theology so vast, so sublime, yet so practical, calling us to all that is mysterious and ghostly in adoration, summoning the soul into the inmost sanctuary of the Invisible God—without a shape on which to rest the affrighted eye, or a line on which to lay the trembling hand ; calling us onward and upward through a silence that makes our very breathing a conscious trespass, and through a light from which our very purity shrinks in shame,—with a theology so practical as to search our hidden life as with fire, to test our standards and balances, to bring our words to judgment, and to track our daily course with the criticism of God,—with a theology demanding personal incarnation in fellowship and service, charging us with the sacred trust of representing Christ to a hostile world, and constantly charging us to prove the reality of our faith by the sincerity of our love,—with such a theology handed to us by inspired penmen for exposition and exemplification, who does not see that high above all other qualifications—even prophecy, tongues, mysteries, and all knowledge—must stand in holy isolation and solitary privilege the PURE HEART that alone can see God !

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The whole of the above argument, instead of being based on the assumption that there *is* a God, raises the inquiry, Here is a Universe,—here is a Society,—here is a Book,—how are they to be accounted for? Hence the practical rather than the metaphysical tone of the reasoning. The first verse in Genesis suggests this discussion. Instead, however, of placing this discussion formally under a given chapter and verse, I have thought it better to regard it as arising from the whole spirit and structure of the Bible, as, in my opinion, it unquestionably does. My hope is that the mere chapter-and-verse method of proof will be increasingly distrusted and discarded, and that it will be replaced by such a conception of the genius and temper of the whole Bible as to render at least the narrowest forms of heresy simply impossible.

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That a book which began with the Creation of the heaven and the earth should end with the confining of Joseph, is a circumstance which not only suggests but necessitates the incompleteness of the record. We are evidently entitled to expect a continuation. We are not meant to be satisfied with Genesis. It is but a beginning; not a mechanical beginning which can be arbitrarily determined, but a vital germ whose development can be suppressed only by ignorance or violence. So, whilst we pause, we pause in an attitude of confident expectation.

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- I. "Ye shall be as gods" (Gen. iii. 5).
- II. "God took him" (Gen. v. 24).
- III. "The place of the altar which he made there at the first" (Gen. xiii. 4).
- IV. "And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him" (Gen. xxv. 9).
- V. "I have learned by experience" (Gen. xxx. 27).
- VI. "And Laban called it Jegar-Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed" (Gen. xxxi. 47).
- VII. "The sun rose upon him" (Gen. xxxii. 31).
- VIII. "And Esau said I have enough, my brother" (Gen. xxxiii. 9).
- IX. "Gad, a troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last" (Gen. xlix. 19).
- X. "And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him" (Gen. l. 15).

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THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE.

PRAYER FOR WISDOM.

FATHER OF SPIRITS, we can never see thee ; but in our hearts we feel thy touch, a touch of humbled almightiness and a nearness as of light. We love thee more than we can ever tell. We go out after thee as if by right, and as if by sweet necessity. Every morning come to us before the sun rises, and every night watch us till the stars die out. Make all things remind us of thy presence, all beauty, all light, all music, all action ; then our life will be large and our inheritance will be infinite wealth. We feel that we have not yet begun to live. Now and then a great throb of life makes us feel somewhat of our possibilities ; yea, even as if we had begun our immortality and set our feet on heaven's land. Then we fall back, and sin, and lie, and long for that which is wholly forbidden. Oh, the torture of this wild contradiction ! We are mad with agony that cannot be borne. Our cheeks burn with shame hotter than any fire of our kindling. Then we would that some Lazarus might be sent with cooling water from the brooks above to stay the infinite torment, but no human answer comes to the crying of our pain. We now come to thyself, for with thee is all the mercy of the Cross. "God be merciful unto us, sinners," and give us the sweet peace which follows Divine pardon. Blessed Saviour, thy fragrant name makes the whole Bible smell as a garden of rare flowers ; to-day we open the Book, that we may walk with thee and hear thy voice and see the wonders which are hidden in the little letter. We would not go a step without thee, for then verily we would go out of the garden into the bare wilderness. Tell us all the meaning of this sacred writing. Make Moses breathe like a living teacher, that he may hold us by the enchantment of thy own name. May the old book become the very newest of writing, because the inspiring Spirit inspires us who read it. Carry forward our knowledge into wisdom, for knowledge puffeth up and kills like a letter which is not understood. Holy One, now hear us. Trinity in heaven, dwell in our hearts as in temples made ready for the holy presence, and may we live so well that we may seem to have lived long. We want to nestle in thy bosom. We want to touch thee. We want—oh, thou knowest all ; why should we not take refuge in all-speaking silence ? Amen.

INTRODUCTORY.

WE are just about to open the Bible, and to fix our eyes upon the very miracle of books. It is a great occasion—a critical hour, full of possibilities beyond present imagining, and big with issues which the day of judgment can alone disclose. My conviction deepens that the Bible is the most modern of books, that is to say, it is the history of the very time which is passing over us ; it contains every man's biography ; it is full of the passion and tragedy, the love and sacrifice, which we know to be the substantial history of the day. The morning newspaper, apparently so fresh and novel, is but a reprint of Moses and the prophets, with some slight difference in incident and colour, but with no difference whatever of moral substance and meaning. So fully persuaded am I of all that is meant by this view that I am prepared to risk the claim for inspiration on the part of the Bible upon it. The Bible is proving its inspiration by the facts which make up both our spiritual experience and our exterior history, or if it is not actually and obviously doing so, it is undermining that claim and hastening its doom as a mere superstition. It is of small consequence to me to know who wrote the Bible, when it was written, what has become of the manuscripts or under what circumstances the book was determined as to shape, size, and limits. Here it is : it is a book, and a book with a history, and for my purpose it is enough to find out what the book actually says to my life, my heart, my conscience, and all my higher faculties, and to judge it, not by some official standard, but by the recognised and most solemn facts which make up human history. That is my ground, and I claim for it the sanction of reason. The Bible asks for no privilege in the matter of judgment : its bold appeal is to the highest court of immediate fact and experience. Even in its deepest mysteries, it is mysteriously human and in no sense superstitiously Divine. My purpose is to make all this clear, and so make the Bible doubly ours, not something held because an irresponsible authority has charged it upon us, but because we have at last a book which knows us, puts our thoughts into words, fills up our need, and teaches us the only prayers which even God can answer. No book can stand upon its mere venerableness except for literary purposes, that is,

as a curiosity or a book of academical exercise and test. Whatever rules living men must itself be living, and whatever rules them profoundly and lastingly must have corresponding depth and durableness in itself.

Let us agree as to the spirit in which we must enter upon those sacred studies. We must rid our minds of all prejudice, and let the book have ample opportunity to make its own impression. We cannot mistake the music of truth. If we rashly begin high up amongst the wordless mysteries, we shall certainly be dazed, and probably be filled with the spirit of unbelief. We must begin on the ground we know—the moral ground, the region of standards, equities, and obligations, and go on from point to point until we enter the upper regions where silence is better than speech. I must ask you, even in our first studies, to be very quiet for a long time, to avoid mental effervescence and the impetuosity of that rude cleverness which rushes to conclusions, and always misses principal meanings. “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” We must, indeed, judge the book in some degree by the spirit which it demands on the part of its readers. If for a moment it can tolerate irreverence, it is no book of God’s. It must devour the frivolous man, yea, even with fire unquenchable, and cast into outer darkness the man who would pry with mental jauntiness into its secret. There need not be any ostentation about the repulse, as if arising from mere pride or vindicating an arbitrary superiority; the repulse must come without show of pique, come as from eternity, and overwhelm with unnameable and immeasurable force. The Bible has no revelation to make to unbiblical minds. It will only speak to the lowly and the helpless, the contrite and the sore in heart. Oh, but this book can be so dumb and can look so blank! It will spread no table for mere daintiness of taste, but will find a whole festival for thorough and expectant hunger. If we come in any other spirit, let us go away at once, that we may escape the pain of humiliation and disappointment; there is really nothing for us in the Bible; it was never meant for us; as well go into the unexplored wilderness to find our father’s house, or dig in the earth to find the gate of heaven. “Open thou mine eyes, that I

may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Thou who didst write the book for man, prepare man to read the book ; give him the sensitive heart, the apt mind, and the obedient and most loyal will ; then shall the book hold all things true, and be unto the soul as the very library of God.

This day I seem to begin my life work, the very thing that expresses my supreme purpose and highest hope. A holy fire glows in my expanding heart as I dwell upon the holy task and all its endless issues. The translation of the Bible which we need from time to time is not a merely grammatical exercise, or a discussion of various readings and ancient authorities. Grammar we must have if we are to have speech, but the grammar being settled, the higher translation has yet to begin. What is that higher translation ? It is such a rendering of the Divine Word as will meet all human need, elevate all human desire, and sanctify all human endeavour ; such a rendering as will show that everything has been provided for in the Bible that human life can ever need or hope for. If we are asked, Why not lecture upon modern events ? the answer is that there are no modern events to lecture upon in any sense which supersedes the Bible. As well try to make a new earth as to make a new book : we make new fields, new gardens, new crops, but the earth abideth the same for ever ; and that is precisely what we do with books—they all grow upon the old soil of the Bible ; they look new, they are superficially new, they are bought and sold as new ; but the Word of the Lord abideth for ever, and man's work is but the labour of a brief day. How much farther have we got than Adam and Eve, man and woman, strength and beauty, the temptation and the sin, the felt nakedness and the sheepskin covering ? Not an inch. Cain still lives in *Cainism*. The world is still bringing deluges upon its own sinful head. Abram is still going forth in quest of a land flowing with milk and honey. Yea, old Eden still blooms, and men are trying to pass the guarding fire and live again as if by force of arms amid its trees and rivers and haunts of green beauty and softness. How to get back to that garden is the problem of all time and the despair of all ambition. There are some who try to be modern and even original, by reading Tennyson in the pulpit in preference to Isaiah, but in doing so

they receive no encouragement from Tennyson himself. These small madnesses are not wholly inexplicable; they have a look of cleverness, and they minister, without the vulgarity of seeming to do so, to the vanity of the madman himself. But there is no durableness in such tricks. A month kills them, or six months at the most drags them into contempt. Isaiah waits, and Isaiah calmly comes to the front again, comes with the stately peace of eternal right. On this conviction I shall endeavour to found myself in carrying out my life-work in this Bible. Nor will it be any strain upon me so to act, for I see everything in the Bible—all law in the Pentateuch, all history in the prophets, all music in the Psalms, all imaginative literature in the parables, all dream and hope and Divinely ordered tumult in the grand Apocalypse. God forbid we should ever accept the sophism that the Bible is a text-book for preachers, and nothing more: it is the people's book: it belongs to the human heart in all days and places. Just in proportion as this can be made clear will the Bible regain its primacy in literature, and secure the homage of an admiring and grateful world. Its protectors will be innumerable—the poor man, the working man, the sorrowing man, the suffering woman, the little child, these will lay down their lives for it, and think the sacrifice too small.

Thus the Bible, like its Author, is not the I WAS, but the I AM—the Immediate, the Present, the Ever-Now; quite a contradiction in mere words, but a perfect consistency in highest life and thought.

It is indeed pitiable, something quite absurdly vain, to hear a certain kind of people making out by lame violence, which they mistake for forcible reasoning, that the Bible is an old-world book, a rag out of fashion, not a garment fit for this day's wearing. Some knavish preachers are not ashamed to do this: they have lived on the dear old book, it has kept them and their families in food and lodging these last thirty years, and yet they have nothing good to say about it; they like better the last book which they do not understand, or the last novel, which is as hemlock or cruel strychnine to the soul. Thieves they be, knaves with pulpit robes reluctantly thrown over their thievish breasts. Beware of them. They are clever liars, swindlers who look too

innocent to be quite guiltless, hirelings who hunger for the pelf. Nay, the black indictment does not end there. They are killers of men; bandits who thrust weapons into souls and slay the young, the unsuspecting, and the frank. I could respect, in some grim way, the vulgar infidel who blasphemes openly and on purpose, and rejoices in his pitiful bellowing, mistaking the very blatancy for courage; but the man in the pulpit who insults the Bible on which he lives, and wriggles out of the professions by which he climbed to the pulpit he dishonours, I charge with worse crimes than those which blackened Barabbas or damned Iscariot. I call for men who will honour the Bible, men of all-seeing purity of heart, men who deliver the messages of God with the tenderness of Christ.

More Bible is what is wanted; fuller reading of the book itself, and a much freer application of it to the facts of daily life. I have not hesitated to say that life itself is the deepest and truest comment upon the Bible, and that in the Bible absolutely everything is to be found in germ and outline. The Bible must be dashed out of the hand of the priest, and put into the hands of the people. I will not have it that the Bible is a mystery book in the sense of being only accessible by experts; it is the people's book, as the firmament is the people's firmament and the air is the people's air. Of course the scientific man has his own view of the sky and his own way of examining the air, yet the poorest dunce may look up into the solemn heights and the meanest drudge drink in the living air. Many people could make more of the sky itself than of a learned lecture upon it, and a mountain breeze could be appreciated when a chemical analysis would be misunderstood. It is so with the Bible. Let the people themselves read "Moses and the prophets," not send for a priest to read for them, but sit down to the sacred task and spell out its infinite thought. Men who can help us to do this—not do this for us—are our true friends. They are the ministers of Christ, and our servants for Christ's sake. They know the true use of the Bible, and prove the inspiration of the book by showing how all life responds to its voice and confirms its moral demands. When they fail to do this they fall from their high vocation and grieve the Spirit of God.

INSPIRATION.

ACCORDING to the teaching of both Testaments, a few men seem to have been Divinely inspired either to speak, or to put into a written form, what was communicated to them as the truth of God. This inspiration was, we are led to believe, accorded to but a few, not one of whom, however, so far as we can learn, ever brought moral discredit upon his solemn and august vocation. Some of them had been even profligate in iniquity *before* their inspiration; but having spoken the word of God, they appear to have been purified as by a holy fire. That their number was but small is rather an argument in favour of their claim than otherwise, when we consider what is evident in all the highest energy and form of life known amongst ourselves. Few men, for example, have been inspired (qualified) to write the intermediate bible of civilisation—that exciting and often tragical book which interposes between the volume of nature and the volume of spiritual testimony. There are but few historians, few poets, few aphorists. Yet the few do not speak for themselves alone: they represent human nature, and establish their right to supremacy and homage in proportion as they speak not the jargon of a class, but the universal language of humanity. Inspiration does not separate David and Paul from the human race: it lifts the human race to a high pinnacle of honour and expectation. The Divine inspiration of one man presupposes a corresponding degree of Divine inspiration (actual or possible) in all other men. Few, indeed, may have been inspired to *speak* the Word, but all have been inspired to *feel* it. Is inspiration, as commonly understood, given to but a few? So is wealth, so is poetry, so is courage, so is art, so is wisdom. The key of the chamber is given to one keeper, but the chamber itself is to be opened for the entrance of the whole world. “Why should David or Paul have been more inspired than I am?” is a peevish inquiry, wanting as much in reason as in dignity, and

finding its natural completion in the profane inquiry—"Why is *God* more Divine than I am?" It is the kind of question which vexes human life with the most pitiful discontent. It brings with it a brood worthy of itself. Why should Homer have been more poetical? Why should Plato have been more philosophical? Why should Euclid have been more mathematical? It will be answered that their supremacy is held only until a higher genius can successfully dispute it, and that Moses and John should be allowed to hold theirs on the same condition. Be it so! Where do Moses and John deprecate a challenge of their personal supremacy? Yet common justice will insist that if the inspiration of the Biblical writers be challenged, *the rival inspiration must cover the whole of the original ground*, for it must be borne in mind that not only do the Biblical writers touch upon some subjects which may be treated by ordinary sagacity and learning, but they distinctly touch subjects which are connected with the innermost life and secret of the universe. It will not be enough, then, to limit the competition to the production of felicitous proverbs or artistic parables; there must be a moral purity, an intellectual grasp, a spiritual insight and sympathy, which shall so combine as to represent the same mastery and familiarity in relation to the invisible and supernatural which are to be found in the inspired Testaments. Then will arise a farther question. Supposing something like an equality in the breadth and tone of the rival revelations, we must know in what direction they respectively move in affecting the practical life of mankind. Does the one move towards reverie, self-content, spiritual isolation? Does the other impel in the direction of philanthropy, sacrifice, worship? These are inquiries which can be definitively settled.

But the complaint is not so much that a *few* writers should have claimed Divine inspiration as that their authority should bind the religious faith of all men through all time. It is the idea of apparent despotism in doctrine that is strongly resented. Is the grievance substantial or imaginary? It should be observed that the Bible opens its revelation without any preliminary contract with the reader either as to a limit of faith or a degree of authority. The believers in inspiration may possibly have

themselves to charge with a grave mistake upon this important point, for it might be supposed by any one who has attended to the controversy without carefully reading the Bible itself that the book has upon its very forefront a distinct statement of its Divine inspiration and authority, which must be accepted without question or murmur. Nothing can be farther from the fact. As to a formal claim of inspiration, there is no more of it in the opening of Genesis than there is in the opening of the Metamorphosis. Were the Bible put into the hands of a scholarly and critical pagan without one word of introduction or comment, he would be a long time in discovering any tittle of a formal claim on the part of the book to be considered inspired and authoritative. He would at once be struck by the loftiness and firmness of its tone, and might be led so far as to say, "This man could not have spoken more boldly had the very gods themselves addressed him from the heavens"; or he might attribute the boldness to the quality of a language peculiar for pomp and sublimity; but he would not be either humbled or embarrassed by a preliminary demand for the surrender of his judgment or his life. The inspiration of the Bible grows upon a man much as a consciousness of his own intellectual and spiritual life grows upon him. This higher consciousness is often sudden in its development. It would seem that in a moment—preceded, it may be, by a long, though more or less unconscious, preparation—an initial lifetime is thrown off and a new spiritual citizenship is established. In this way the slave of dictionaries sometimes rises into a master of languages, the slow cipherer into a philosophical arithmetician, and the cautious student of politics into a sagacious statesman. The line of separation is invisible, almost imaginary, yet it divides experiences that are most diverse. In some such way the Bible has suddenly elevated itself from a school book to a revelation, and men have felt that they could not set it again in the rank of common writings without a sense of serious moral loss. They have not foreseen the result of their reading. At first they yielded to a merely literary fascination; by-and-by moral sympathy was touched in some degree; curiosity was excited; then came wonder, and after wonder came uncertainty, like a keen pain in the heart; then came a sentence like this to test the faith and to ripen the strange experience into Christian

joy : " Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost " ; and with that sentence came a responsibility which put the reader into a new and solemn relation to the book.

If the Bible is Divinely inspired, it follows that it is Divinely authoritative. Inspiration and authority must stand or fall together. Consider what it is that is professedly revealed. What is it ? It is not history ; it is not cosmogony ; it is not ethnology ; it is not even a code of morals. It is worth while, then, to pause a moment, that we may get the full emphasis of the answer. The supreme revelation that is made in the Bible is the revelation of God. Everything else belongs to the region of detail. The Divine personality is the vital and all-embracing revelation. Creation may suggest it, the curious interweaving and combination of daily events may point towards it as towards a possibility, but the Bible distinctly reveals it as the secret of all things. But the Bible, having made this revelation, cannot stop there. The term *God* includes all other terms. It is not a high symbol in abstract reasoning, or the almost ærial line which the metaphysician is content to begin with : it is the all-controlling factor in regions visible and invisible—it is this, or it is nothing. The moment, therefore, that the question of Divine Fatherhood or Rulership is raised, all the great questions covered by the term *humanity* are raised along with it, and by their very urgency they may easily create a clamour unfavourable to the consideration of their most important bearings. It is better, therefore, to reason downward from the quiet and solemn heights of the Divine personality than to struggle upwards through all the controversy and bewilderment of human interests. If the Bible declares the true idea of God, it must presumptively give the true doctrine of human nature. God must be self-declared. Man has no instruments that can measure the Divine power, or search out the Divine wisdom. But *how* is God to grant a revelation of himself ? Christian theology answers,—By the inspiration of chosen men who shall be his instruments for this special purpose. Instantly that inspiration becomes thus individualised a great difficulty arises—the very difficulty which has been pointed out in the Divine incarnation : we look at the Divine mystery through the human medium, and instead of fixing the mind upon the inspiring Spirit, we fix it upon the inspired man.

It is thus that loss is incurred, and that disadvantage is inflicted upon the subjects of inspiration. To speak, for example, of the inspiration of *David*, is to limit a Divine quantity by a human personality; and the danger (almost inevitable) is that the mind be fixed upon the term *David* rather than upon the term *inspiration*. We must enlarge the minor term if we can; and how is this to be done but by speaking, not of the inspiration of Moses or David, Ezekiel, or John, but of the inspiration of *humanity*, the individuals themselves being nothing but the points of contact at which a Divine action is set up? Much is gained by this elimination of the personal element. Inspiration is greater than personality. Instead of speaking of the authority of *Paul*, we are to speak of the authority of *truth*: Paul may, indeed, have been chosen as the medium of utterance, but the utterer is God. It is mere peevishness, or perhaps defiance, which chafes at the authority of a *man*; that is not the question at all; assent is sought to the proposition that the eternal authority of God has been declared through human instrumentality. In what other way could it have been declared? Is there any other way so free from the vulgarity of sensationalism, so rational, so philosophical, so ennobling, so sublime? No homage is offered to Moses, to David, or to Paul. The Bible, in all its Divine elements, would be unimpaired were the names of its human penmen removed. Yet those names are of peculiar value in humanising a volume which requires softening shadows to mitigate its unique glories. The writers never obtrude their personal dignity; they never conceal their personal weaknesses; the word of the Lord is a burden to them, and is often accepted with hesitation and misgiving. But what if there be slips or other faults in the work of the inspired men? In one sense, so much the better; in the sense, for example, that these are imperfections which actually beget confidence—superficial imperfections which give all the advantage of contrast to work that is known to be solid and enduring. The musician is limited by his instrument. Though he may have ravished a world by his strains, he could be almost angry with the instrument which has failed to express the still finer tones which madden him with indescribable joy. In the matter of inspiration the Almighty proposed to dwell in houses of clay; what wonder if they were unequal to such a Presence?

We have said that the Divine inspiration of one man presupposes a corresponding degree of Divine inspiration (actual or possible) in all other men. The inspiration of speech presupposes the inspiration of hearing, true listening being much more than an exercise of a merely physical function. If few men know how to speak, fewer still know how to listen. Men are preoccupied; voices of prejudice, interest, self-worship, never cease to besiege the ear of the soul: add to these a drowsiness hardly distinguishable from a temptation, and a persistent appeal from the whole external estate of life, and the difficulty of spiritual hearing will be no longer a mystery. The universal inspiration comes through a quickening and sanctifying action upon the *moral sense* of mankind. The one thing which that moral sense never did accomplish is *the discovery of God*. In its most exalted and energetic moods it got no farther than an inscription to the Unknown Power,—a long way, too,—a sublime distance, verily,—still not a Bible, but a marble slab.

That the Biblical revelation of God does not instantly satisfy every mind, and bring into unanimity the religious sentiment of the world, is a self-destructive argument as applied against the doctrine of Divine inspiration. It proves too much. Where is there unanimity upon any subject which challenges alike the intellectual and moral attention of mankind? Not only so; the Bible itself anticipates the very difficulty, and mourns with pathetic lamentation that the disclosure of God has been received with incredulity or resentment. If it be suggested that such a revelation should have been given as would at once, by its copiousness and brilliance, have established itself in the confidence of the world, the suggestion proceeds in forgetfulness of the fact that that very confidence itself has been warped and vitiated, and is no longer the simple and honest love which is the secret of spiritual sympathy and interpretation. How to recover the idea of God was the problem. The Bible distinctly undertakes its solution, and in so doing claims authoritatively to be known, not as a volume of history, a code of morals, a treatise on philosophy, but as the one written Book of *God*.

Inspiration had at the very outset to encounter the difficulty of *language*, inasmuch as there was no speech common to the whole world. The world has a common heart, a common nature,

a common instinct, but not a common tongue. Even in the same language words constantly vary in expressiveness and value: not only does time change their application and their limits, but they actually convey different meanings to different minds; and there is not always an interpreter at hand to draw the line of exact signification and prevent confusion and controversy. A word may not seem precisely the same thing to any two men, though it may be well known to both of them in a rough sense, which may suffice for ordinary purposes. How to express an eternal quantity through a mutable language! This is in another form the precise difficulty of the Incarnation, for what flesh is to spirit speech is to thought. The difficulty has never been wholly overcome—certainly not in the Incarnation, for Jesus Christ was despised and rejected of men; and certainly not in the Bible, for it has provoked more controversy, fiercer and bitterer too, than any other book in all literature. It should be noted, too, that the very objections which from the beginning have been urged against Christ have also been pressed against the Bible—objections relating to form, to structure, to origin, to apparent contradiction, and to manifest insufficiency to meet the demands of the situation. In both cases human expectation was set at nought, and something was offered which could not but mortify the pride of the receiver. We must, then, go beyond forms, symbols, and measurable quantities, and find the meaning of inspiration in elevation and purity of thought, in the scrupulousness and magnanimity of moral instinct, in the ennobling and all-hoping charity by which our best life is distinguished, and ceasing all pedantic strife about mere *words*, must cast ourselves with reverence and holy joy upon the eternal *Word*.

So far we have looked at inspiration as a *doctrine*; if we are to estimate its value as a *fact*, we must get at least a general notion of the principal characteristics of the particular book on behalf of which inspiration is claimed. In this and the succeeding chapter we shall move within what may be called extra-theological limits, for a purpose which will be disclosed as we proceed. At the outset, we must strongly deny that any man could *à priori* have told the proper scope and tone of a book Divinely inspired. It is one thing to have the book, and to reason backwards; it is another to be called upon, in its absence, to say exactly what an inspired

revelation should be. We have to found an opinion upon a particular book, and it will be entirely for the book itself to prove its own inspiration. The Bible must do what every other book must do, that is to say, it must make its own place in the world ; let it prove its inspiration by inspiring its readers ; let it show its heavenliness by the amount of heaven which it sets up on earth ; if it fail by these tests, any attempt to uphold it by organised authority is absurd and hopeless. The object of this chapter is to gather into one view three or four marked characteristics of the book, simply regarded as a literary composition, and to ask the reader to assign them some value in the argument. At first, we open the Bible for critical, and not for theological purposes, and at once we encounter the difficulty arising from a profusion of peculiar and startling characteristics.

1. The Bible is undoubtedly marked by *a wonderful reserve of power*. Its writers nowhere betray any sign of exhaustion, nor do they display the slightest wish to make the most of their materials in a literary point of view. There are single chapters which any writer could easily have elaborated into a volume. The rule seems to have been to say everything in the fewest possible words. The Bible abounds in indications, brief, vivid, and multitudinous, and is, hence, pre-eminently a text-book. We wonder that the writers do not say more, yet we feel that even in their brevity they have said more than any other men have ever said. They have marvellous skill in perspective. They excite the greatest expectations, and then teach the readers whom they have thus almost frenzied that such expectations are to be held as a discipline, and not to be pushed to a premature fulfilment. The great ambition of other sacred books seems to be to do everything : they put a key into every lock, under every enigma they write at least a conjectural answer, they determine the attitudes and services proper to every hour of the day, and whatever intellectual energy they have is apparently expressible in letter and symbol. They resemble the finite in an ambitious determination to represent the infinite, whereas the Bible represents the infinite in a condescending endeavour to find expression in the finite. The Bible is a perpetual beginning, rich in its immediate satisfactions, but richer still in its promises. Through every revelation there is a hint of another revelation yet to

come. The Bible has a wonderful firmament, out of which the light comes, and the rain, and from which the key of heaven may at any moment drop. Its earth is very legible; its firmament is an eternal mystery. Is this, then, the kind of book which is presumably worthy of a high origin? In this reserve of power has it any resemblance to the book of physical nature? In Bashan are there not more acorns than oaks? Under quiet exteriors are there any fierce energies? Is there anywhere a sign of exhaustion, as if the creation were almost equal to the Creator? Completeness may be a sign of weakness. Omnipotence has no final line. When the artist says that he can add nothing further to his picture, he confesses the limitation of his power: the attainment of his ideal is the signature of his weakness. The Bible is full of gaps, of unfinished pictures, of jagged and broken outlines; in the artistic sense of the word there is no perfection—the question is whether there is sufficient astronomic force to overcome all surface inequalities, and to secure the velocity which is rest and the friction which is light. The theologian must determine this, rather than the critic.

2. The Bible grapples with *the highest subjects* which can engage the attention of mankind. A professedly inspired book treating of mere trifles, or of points which are but of secondary interest, would have been the very cruelty of irony. The Bible advances instantly to the highest lines of spiritual inquiry: God, creation, invisible worlds, sin, death, immortality, are its familiar themes. But more important than the fact of its grappling with such subjects is its peculiar method of treating them. Its approach, so to speak, is invariably from the higher side: the Bible *reveals*, it does not *suggest*; it *declares*, it does not *investigate*; all the surprise is on the side of the reader, never on the side of the writer. Looked at in the light of presumptive inspiration, this is precisely the proper result. If God has spoken at all, he must have spoken positively and authoritatively. The *tone* of the Bible is emphatically immodest and exaggerated if it is the tone of mere inquirers or speculators; on the other hand, it is the only tone (so far as we can judge) that befits the supremacy and condescension of God. The imperative mood, which is seemly in a king, is brusque in an equal and impertinent in an inferior. This is the mood of the Bible. Though its subjects are innumerable,

there is no incertitude in its statement of any one of them ; more, indeed, might have been stated as it appears to our impatience, but more may mean less, as excess of light is equivalent to darkness. The Bible tone is such as befits inspiration, but it is an obvious and fatal mistake if it is *vox et præterea nihil*. Even ordinary men may secure respect when they speak subjunctively, but when they speak imperatively they become ridiculous and contemptible. It is not difficult to distinguish between a bray and a roar.

The precision and weight of the tone will be seen to be the more remarkable when the peculiarity of the revelation is considered. The Bible seems to have a line without a limit. In nature, we seem to be bounded by the horizon ; yet who has measured its diameter, or laid his hand upon the sky line ? We move towards it, yet we never get away from the centre. It is the same with the Divine revelation. Its sky line recedes as we advance. The limit is visible yet unapproachable. We can get to the end of the chapters, yet we never get to the end of the book. The Bible combines a wide liberty with a conspicuous and sacred law of trespass. Its words of promise are rich in incentive and solace ; thus :—"I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" ; "We know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" ; "It doth not yet appear what we shall be" ; "Hereafter ye shall see" ; "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." By such words (were there no other) the Bible separates itself from all other books which claim to convey such sacred communications.

3. Not only does the Bible grapple with the greatest subjects, and pronounce upon them with dogmatic precision and emphasis ; *it so discloses its subjects as to demand the interest of all nations through all time.* The Bible insists upon being the Book of the whole world. It does this, too, in a very wonderful manner. At first it makes no claim as to circulation. By-and-by it becomes a book of much importance to a particular people. Farther on, its language increases in copiousness and boldness. Finally, it declares its leaves to be for the healing of the nations. The change of tone as between the Old Testament and the New is one

of the most remarkable phenomena in all literature. There is a steady, though often imperceptible, movement from the local to the universal : in the Old Testament there is an antiquity which makes one solemn ; so gigantic, so silent, so irreparable, are the ruins of empire, ritual, and fortune ; there we find the thick moss, the biting canker, the seal of death ; and all this strangely interspersed with beauty which must live for ever : in the New Testament there is all the stir of modern life—enterprise, revolution, progress. Men are moving from land to land, speaking in all languages, publishing one Name, and bearing one grim symbol. Is such a movement in keeping with the presumptive inspiration of the book ? The Old Testament having reached the height of sublimity, what eminence remained for the new ? After thunder and pomp, resounding trumpets and tramp of mailed men, there came gentleness and beauty, purity and nobleness, pardon and love. Is such a line of development in keeping with the presumptive inspiration of the book ? What could be more daring than to displace a soldier by a missionary ? This is an anti-climax in history, unless, indeed, it be “ the foolishness of God.”

Looking at great breadths of history, it is evident that the believers in the Abesta, the Veda, and even the Koran, have not been careful to create a system of world-wide propagation of their respective faiths. Little beyond a military spasm in the case of the last of them has been attempted in this direction. But the believers in the Bible have been impelled to translate it into all languages and to send it into all regions. The Bible has, as a mere matter of fact, forced its way where no other book has ever gone ; and as for the variety of intellect which it has interested in its fortunes, no other writing can bear comparison with it. The coldest and the most ardent temperaments have alike sought to extend its influence : the richest learning and the most splendid eloquence have felt honoured in its service, and the most valorous men have hazarded their lives to publish its contents in hostile lands. They have done this because of the effect of Bible teaching upon their hearts ; necessity was laid upon them, and out of this necessity came their highest joy. Such facts, which can be verified without trouble, show how true it is that the Bible so discloses its subjects as to claim the homage

of all nations through all time. This consideration is evidently of some value as a practical test of the presumptive inspiration of the book. If nature be recalled as a witness, we shall be told that *universality* characterises all the great gifts of God, and *therefore* will probably mark any revelation which professes to have been indited by his Spirit.

4. The Bible contains *the most startling proposition as to the destruction of sin*. In some respects this is its supreme peculiarity. The action which the Bible proposes is infinitely more remarkable on the *Divine* side than on the human. How to take *sin* out of the world is the problem. Let the mind dwell upon the terms for a moment that their import may be felt. *How* is sin to be met, overcome, ultimately and for ever destroyed? By a poor human struggle? By self-ablution? By self-mutilation? Is sin to be taken away only by taking away the *sinner*? What originality would there be in so obvious and coarse a method? The question is how to save the man and destroy the sin, and the answer to an inquiry so vital cannot but be waited for with anxious impatience! In the midst of speculative debate upon the point, the Bible comes forward with this startling answer: *God himself will die, the just for the unjust!* If this be not the supreme blasphemy, it is the very Gospel of God! One or other it certainly is. It is not an answer that can be spoken of with indifference. As a human suggestion it is utter madness. It is salvation that is contemplated in the terms of the inquiry, but how can salvation come by death? Observe, this immediate argument does not touch the theology of the proposition; it is wholly concerned with the mere facts which lie upon the very surface of the inquiry, the most tragical of which is the proposition that the just should die for the unjust, and that by the shedding of blood should come the remission of sins. It is enough, in this connection, that we merely point it out, with the humble confession, indeed, that if it be not the most awful of all irony, and therefore the most sinful of all sins, it is the most affecting doctrine that ever appealed to the human heart! There it is, however, and the student must deal with it. If he gives it the go-by, he instantly disqualifies himself for this high investigation; he flees from difficulty, and becomes a mere trifler in controversy. If he takes it up seriously, he may possibly find that it gives articulate-

ness to emotions that have long troubled his own heart with a kind of pleasurable pain—the pain of suffering and death, that he might make a way for the pardon and restoration of his own sinning child. The child may never have measured his own sin until he has seen the agony of his father's wounded love. But here we are touching points beyond our argument. This, suffice it now to say, is a mystery not to be illuminated by words—any heart that has suffered much through the sinfulness of others will catch some far-off hint of its meaning; for the rest, there is no interpretation possible to us.

5. The Bible is marked by *a marvellous combination of sublimity and condescension alike as to subject and to method of treatment*. There are heights from which descent would seem to be impossible, and there are familiarities which are apparently too minute and common to permit of return to the highest dignity. Yet the return, in both directions, is made with an ease which, even in a literary point of view, is undoubtedly wonderful, as if the heights and the depths were in reality but one plane to the invisible and ruling Spirit. If astronomic motion smooths the mountainous and rugged surface of earth, what if spiritual velocity make one line of things which to us are high and low, sublime and approachable? What a book is the Bible in the mere matter of variety of contents! Everything seems to be in it: poem, narrative, music, friendship, personal news, national intelligence, judgment, battle, prayer, song, anathema, and benediction. The bush is common enough, but what of the fire which makes the shepherd turn aside? The bread is such as has been used at supper, yet presently it will become the body of Christ! Paul is almost in heaven, yet in the very height of his anticipations he asks for his parchments and his cloak, and he knows exactly where both were left. Whole pages are taken up with obscure names, and more is told of a genealogy than of the day of judgment. Stories are half told, and the night falls before we can tell where the victory lay. Where is there anything to correspond with this? Not in any book, certainly, but in actual life there is the selfsame thing over again without the loss of one line. If the sun could print for us what he sees on any day in the year, he would print a second edition of the Bible. We should have it all over again, including perhaps something even of creation itself, with its light, its

ascending and descending waters, its trees bringing forth each after its kind, its sunny day, its starry night; but the humanity would be the same, still more vividly—family life, love, fear, envy, covetousness, magnanimity; chosen people and alien lands, temples warm with the fire of the Lord, and houses of vain and corrupt idolatry; the noise of war and the song of peace; shepherds keeping their flocks, and soldiers listening for the foe; David in the wilderness and Jonah on the sea; weird dreams, spectral hands on the wall, baffled magicians, and truth-telling prophets; psalms for which no music is good enough, and proverbs that glisten with wit. All these, and more, we should have on every or any day in the year if the sun could but print as well as shine! This is just the Bible. It is a page torn out of the great volume of human life, only torn by the hand of God, and annotated by his Spirit. What is the daily newspaper but a revised translation of the Bible, often, indeed, with God left out in the spelling, though he cannot be left out in reality? Take to-morrow's paper in one hand and the Bible in the other, and see if the paper be not full of repetitions and if there be not something like an echo in all its utterances.

Other indications might be made, but these will do in the meantime, as indicating at least a basis of judgment. Here is a book which is marked by a wonderful reserve of power, which grapples with the greatest subjects which can engage the attention of mankind, which so grapples with them as to demand (under sanctions, too) the attention of all men through all time, which offers the most startling proposition for the removal of sin, and which is marked by a marvellous combination of sublimity and condescension, alike as to subject and to method of treatment. Is such a book, judging by these characteristics, likely to sustain any claim to be an inspired and authoritative revelation of the will of God? We only ask for a *primâ facie* case. If such a case be granted, probably a careful and honest perusal of the Bible will follow, and this will be something gained.

THE SPIRITUAL ORGAN.

“ANY tyro can see the facts for himself if he is provided with those not rare articles a nettle and a microscope.” These words are Mr. Huxley’s. But why the microscope? Suppose the “tyro” should be provided with “a nettle” only? These inquiries point in a direction which materialists are unwilling to pursue in all its bearings and applications. The introduction of the microscope is an admission that even the keenest eyes cannot see certain substances, forms, and movements without the aid of optical instruments. Great store is to be set by this admission, for it requires in material investigation precisely what is demanded in spiritual inquiry. Suppose that one of Mr. Huxley’s students should insist upon examining the nettle without the aid of the microscope, and should declare that he is unable to verify Mr. Huxley’s observations? Mr. Huxley would properly reply that the inner structure and life of the nettle could not be seen by the naked eye, for they are microscopically “discerned.” Common-sense would confirm the justness of this answer, and hold the student disentitled to pronounce any opinion upon the question. Now this is precisely what St. Paul does in treating the subject of spiritual investigation; he says that such an investigation cannot be conducted without an organ of which the microscope is a good emblem: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”—the student without the microscope cannot fully or scientifically examine the plant, neither can any inquirer discern and understand “the things of the Spirit of God,” without a spiritual organ adapted to the difficulty of the investigation.

It will be remembered that Mr. Huxley desiderated for the ear something equivalent in service to the use of the microscope; thus: “The wonderful noonday silence of a tropical forest is, after all, due only to the dulness of our hearing; and could our ears

catch the murmurs of these tiny Maelstroms as they whirl in the innumerable myriads of living cells which constitute each tree, we should be stunned as with the roar of a great city." If Mr. Huxley could discover an instrument which could do for the ear what the microscope does for the eye, he would be entitled to claim attention to it, and to insist that no judgment respecting the air of a tropical forest was of any scientific value that was not formed by the aid of such instrument. This, again, is precisely the ground taken in the Bible; thus: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear"—"They have ears to hear and hear not." There is hearing *and* hearing. Let two men listen to the same music; the one shall be held as by a spell, and the other shall become weary and impatient: to the one man the music is a revelation, to the other is a mere noise. In such a case whose judgment would be taken in valuing the music? An artist judging the controversy would say, This is not ordinary music; it is rich in unusual combinations; it cannot be received by the untrained or unsympathetic ear; it can be discerned only by the very spirit of music itself. Such an explanation would be allowed as valid and satisfactory, and the opposing opinion, formed without natural or scientific capability, would be held to be impertinent and worthless. It is just so that St. Paul talks upon Christian subjects. He insists that spiritual things must be compared with spiritual; that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; that such things are actually foolishness unto the natural man, so much so that he can neither receive them nor understand them, for they are spiritually discerned: he also explains why the Gospel is not seen with equal clearness by all men. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them"; and as to his own knowledge of the Gospel, St. Paul says, "I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." So steadfastly does he stand to it that a spiritual microscope or organ is needed. He allows natural wit, sagacity, penetration, no place in this investigation: the gift is special; the power comes down from God. It will, of course, be easy to deny St. Paul's authority, but mere denial

amounts to nothing. In his turn St. Paul might deny the authority of the musical interpreter, and treat with contempt every canon by which painting or eloquence is judged. If we cannot see the organism of a nettle without a microscope, can we see "the things of the Spirit of God" without special illumination? A man who will not give an opinion upon the exact structure of a grass blade without the help of a microscope ought to be the last man to deny the need of a spiritual organon for the interpretation of spiritual realities. Mr. Huxley will reply that the results of microscopic inquiry are self-illustrative and self-proving; but that is a mere accident of the case, arising from the fact that the thing examined is itself visible: but when did a microscope reveal a thought, or follow all the excitement of a passion? Yet thought and passion are susceptible of intellectual and moral analysis. Men understand each other by common sympathies. The mere mathematician does not understand the poet. Silence and speech may be mutual mysteries. Strangers who never saw each other may prove to be kindred in soul. Call it sympathy, affinity, spiritual faculty, or what you may, there is the fact that some kind of organon is needed for the fullest interpretation of all life that is marked by depth and richness. St. Paul gives this fact its spiritual application, or its application to the study of spiritual questions; he says there is a witness of the Spirit—a Divine shining in the heart—a birth—without which no man can see the kingdom of God. What is there unreasonable in this view, or improbable? What if religion itself be the instrument through which we read the things of the Spirit of God?

Another illustration supplied by science itself will point in the same direction. There are two shining surfaces afar off; they are both equally bright: viewed by the naked eye, there is no difference between them. Now examine them through the polariscope, and the one will show itself to be fire, and the other merely a reflection—not one spark of fire or ray of light in it! So much for the medium of observation. Yet when Christianity teaches that a special organ is needed for the interpretation of spiritual things, the materialist demurs and objects. Science itself being witness, the most piercing eye needs microscopic help; yet science is occasionally unjust enough to deny to others what is indispensable to

itself. St. John attributes spiritual knowledge to "an unction from the Holy One," and St. Paul teaches the same doctrine in words very clear and strong: "Since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen it, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him" (Isa. lxiv. 4), . . . "*but God hath revealed it unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*" (1 Cor. ii. 10). Such words show that the difficulty of spiritual interpretation was felt long before modern scientists propounded their non-spiritual theories, and they show also that the difficulty was met in the only practicable way, namely, by requiring a spiritual organ for the interpretation of spiritual personalities and doctrines. Christian thinkers might have been troubled if no provision had been made for the treatment of this materialistic objection, for then it would have seemed as if "the whole armour of God" was short of one weapon; but the folly was answered before the fool had spoken, that no one might imagine he had gotten an advantage against God.

It may be difficult to express in one word the nature of this spiritual organ, impossible, indeed, unless we go to Jesus Christ, who came to reveal the Father. He will give us the universal term. In the Old Testament we have hints, broken and scattered lights, of which we can make little that is complete and final, but in the sayings of Jesus and the writings which grew out of them we find terms which cover all things. In the New Testament there is one answer to all the great questions which excite human thinking; thus: What is God? God is *love*. What is the greatest commandment? Thou shalt *love*. To whom will God reveal himself? "He that *loveth* me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." Love is the universal language—the child knows it, and the savage; it blesses earth, and is the very heavenliness of heaven. Not only so; it is the secret of all success, as it is the inspiration of all labour. And more still, it is not only true of Jesus that manifestation follows love; it is equally true of all ordinary things, and therefore presumptively true of spiritual illumination and progress. It may be helpful to the main argument to dwell upon this thought for a moment. To whom will any earnest *man* most unreservedly manifest himself? To a friend or to an enemy?

To a cold critic or a sympathetic listener? Let two of his acquaintances or even kinsfolk be equally intelligent and honest, yet let one of them excel the other in tenderness or appreciativeness, in that one indescribable element which expresses itself in welcome and hospitality—not the welcome of ceremony, or the hospitality of bread—and to which of them will he manifest most of his inner life? He will in effect use the words of Jesus Christ, “I will manifest myself to him that loveth me.” This is the testimony of universal experience. To whom will *nature* reveal itself—the sea, the hill, the light? To the clown or to the poet? The poet gets something out of “the meanest flower that blows.” Appreciation creates for itself new heavens and a new earth. The wise listener hears music in the wind, the stream, and the twitter of unfamed birds. What does the clown hear, or the sordid man? Noises without order, tongues unknown and uninterpreted. Nature says precisely what Jesus Christ says—“I will manifest myself to him that loveth me.” Illustrations are afforded by every aspect of life. We get out of nature and art what we ourselves bring to them. The Royal Academy is a show of coloured canvas, or a church of lofty and sacred genius, according to the capacity, the sympathy, or the reverence of the observer; any dog may see the canvas, but only a painter or a poet can see the picture. We have here, then, a continuance of the same reasonableness that marked the use of instruments, and in addition we have a tender graciousness expressed in the fact that the organ is a simple and universal faculty, which every man holds as part of his very manhood, and which he can exercise under all possible conditions of life.

A remarkable expression, in harmony with this interpretation of love, is used by St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans: “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be”; enmity is set in opposition to love, and carnality in opposition to spiritual-mindedness. The carnal mind is not only enmity against godliness, or some modification or form of religion; it is enmity against *God*—the controversy is not with a fraction, but with the whole number. But the carnal mind! is not that a remarkable contradiction in terms? Not in terms only, but also in actual life, for the anomaly is known to every observer of human

nature. Mind may be so overpowered by the gratification of animal appetites as to become the minor quantity in manhood, the body so overgrown as almost to have absorbed the soul. Where this is the case the very idea of *God* is repugnant, because that idea necessitates government, discipline, responsibility, all of which, again, are founded upon absolute and infinite holiness. Such a mind is at perpetual enmity against God: it is not subject to the law of God (carrying the ideas of government, discipline, and responsibility), neither indeed can be; "They that are in the flesh cannot please God"—"The world cannot receive the Spirit of truth, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him." More than the gratification of bodily appetites is involved in being "in the flesh" or having "the carnal mind." Self-gratification is a wide term; it is interchangeable with self-trust, self-sufficiency, self-completeness, or self-idolatry. Such selfhood always exists to the exclusion of spirituality; it is enmity against God, and, properly understood, it is enmity against human nature and against society. The reasonableness of this ought to be acknowledged by scientists even of the most irreligious class, for the moment they touch any medium or instrument of observation they acknowledge their own incompleteness, and their consequent need of help. The self-satisfied mind is enmity against science as much as against religion. It declares its own sufficiency, and by so much it declines offers of illumination or advancement. St. Paul, therefore, was stating a universal truth when he said that "the carnal mind is enmity against God." Docility is one of the first conditions of improvement, but docility and self-sufficiency are incompatible; there is a controversy between them, and according to the settlement of that contention will be the spirit and character of the future man.

From these observations it will be seen that in declining the leadership of the materialists we justify ourselves by denying their qualification to judge spiritual questions. Intellectual vigour as applied in one direction accounts for nothing in such qualification: "Having eyes, they see not; having ears, they hear not; and having hearts, they do not understand." Among them that are born of women there may not have appeared men of greater intellectual capacity, but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than their chief or king. Evidently so, for it is

a higher kingdom altogether, involving destinies and conferring advantages which cannot be described in comparative terms. The great error which scientists have committed is having, *as such*, taken upon themselves to give any opinion upon spiritual subjects; and religious men would commit a similar error if, *as such*, they undertook to pronounce judgment upon purely scientific questions. A man who has familiarised himself with the organism of a nettle is not *therefore* entitled to give an opinion upon the inspiration of the Bible, any more than is a man who can compose a sermon *therefore* qualified to criticise a painting. Scientists, too, may avail themselves of the very questionable advantage of supposing themselves able to ignore religion, whereas religious men are bound by their very loyalty to the Christian faith to encourage and applaud the progress of science, and to turn such progress into an occasion of religious thankfulness. Scientists have at present the charm of novelty, almost romance, whilst religious thinkers are reposing upon truths ripened and mellowed by centuries, yet capable of adaptation to the demands of current experience and progress. Controversy between science and religion is wholly out of place, and was not begun by religion. Science, falsely so called, and vain philosophy have been consistently condemned by Christian apostles, but the very terms show reverence for what is true and solid both in the one and in the other. Probably that controversy will not be allayed until the relationships (as distinguished from the dogmas) of religion and science be adjusted. Science marks but a single province of human inquiry, and (not impossibly) is as at present pursued limited to one section of one world; religion, on the other hand, touches the whole circle of human life, and rules the spirit and habitudes of all worlds. To compare the universal with the limited is to be unjust to both, and to exalt the limited above the universal is to replace the sun with a private lamp. Religion and science has each its peculiar mystery; and if the one is to be avoided or discredited on account of its difficulties, the other must fall by the rigour of the same law.

In his "Synthetic Philosophy (First Principles)" Mr. Herbert Spencer concludes an elaborate and able chapter on ultimate religious ideas with a remarkable suggestion bearing upon this

argument. Having expounded a good many theories, and shown the insufficiency of a good many hypotheses, he says, "Thus the mystery which all religions recognise turns out to be a far more transcendent mystery than any of them suspect—not a relative, but an absolute mystery. . . . The Power which the universe manifests to us is utterly inscrutable." In a theologian this tone would have been regarded as dogmatic; certainly its modesty is well hidden by its decisive vigour. But is the doctrine true? So far as the Bible is concerned, it is *not* true that the absolute inscrutableness of the Power was unsuspected. On the contrary, it is affirmed in manifold terms, and specially declared by Jesus Christ. "No man knoweth the Father save the Son"; "No man hath seen God at any time"; "No man can see God and live." A recollection of such sentences would have modified the breadth of the foregoing assertion, and brought down its argumentative value to its proper nothingness. We have already pointed out that this is a question of *revelation*; the inscrutableness is granted ("Who can find out God, or know the Almighty unto perfection?"), but the distinct revelation is also affirmed by Jesus Christ, and that affirmation has created for itself too great an influence in the world to be simply ignored. At the risk of retraversing a few steps, it may be well to recall the emphasis of that affirmation, "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him"; "No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him"; "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world"; "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father"; "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also." With declarations such as these before us, identified with a name upon which a Church is founded, and supported by a character whose purity and beneficence have excited the wonder of the world, is it fair on the part of any philosopher to dwell upon the inscrutableness of God as if no revelation had at all events been professed? If Mr. Herbert Spencer had never heard of the Christian faith, he could only have stopped where he has done so; but with that faith before him, he was bound to respect it, at least on intellectual grounds. We insist that it be remembered that Mr. Herbert Spencer has not treated the Christian argument, con-

sidered as an anticipation of his own theory, and that therefore the paganism of his logic should not be taken for more than it is worth.

Looking at the whole ground thus traversed, two convictions have been strengthened by the anti-Christian argument:—

First, that the theoretical exclusion of the spiritual element, instead of diminishing the mystery of human life, greatly and painfully increases it. Viewing the whole question as lying within the province of reason, it is to us *easier* to believe that behind all visible things there is an infinite and eternal Spirit than to believe that all things are self-existent, self-dependent, and wholly material. Our opinion upon this point has been clearly expressed by the author just quoted—"The atheistic theory is not only absolutely unthinkable, but even if it were thinkable, would not be a solution: the assertion that the universe is self-existent does not really carry us a step beyond the cognition of its present existence, and so leaves us with a mere restatement of the mystery." Reason itself is more satisfied with the theory of an independent origin and a supreme rule than with the theory of no origin and no supremacy. If any man could make good a proposition to give us a doctrine of the universe without mystery, and that would satisfy all the inquiries of reason, he would come into the discussion with immense advantage; but instead of such a proposition, we are invited to accept a theory which treats a part as if it were the whole, and offers no answer to the wonder and the sorrow of human life. If the Bible were removed from civilisation, it would leave more mystery behind it than it would take away, with this difference, too: that whilst without it we should have mystery cold, dark, and despairing, with it we have mystery relieved by light and accompanied by the most pathetic and comforting promises. It cannot be too constantly remembered that the Bible itself fully recognises its own mysteries, and never once asks to be accepted on the ground that it removes every difficulty from human thinking, and renders it impossible for the human intellect to confound itself by impious speculation. From beginning to end there is mystery in the Bible, but is it not just such mystery as the awfulness of eternity might be supposed to throw

upon the narrow and troubled way of time? Is not a man a mystery to a child? And being such, is his existence to be denied or his superiority to be questioned? The child himself is a mystery, and the man is but a continuation of the same difficulty. There is a mystery that is natural and proper, even necessary, so to say; and there may be a mystery which is simply arbitrary, or a mystery to those only who refuse to avail themselves of proffered light. Is there any monotony so intolerable as life would be without mystery? Every day brings its own secret, and the surprise of the coming hour is often its keenest joy. Properly understood, it may be that mystery is but the longer word for mercy. We are drawn forward by the mighty and often gracious power of the *unknown*. What is beyond the next curve on the road? May not to-morrow open our prison door? By such questioning is melancholy kept at bay, and weakness preserved from despair. All our life is set in mystery, from the cradle to the grave: education, enterprise, art, wit, poetry, music, are all caught in the same cloud, a cloud often dark, yet with fringes of light and rents through which the blue is seen. Reduce the universe to a self-existent, self-ruling, and self-terminating machine, and still there will remain the mysteries: How came it to be? By what means is it kept together? How did we come into it? What is the final appeal of right against wrong? And what is there, if anything, beyond death? Materialism is deficient in compass: it cannot comprehend the whole case: its analysis of a leaf is admirable, but it is lost amidst the secrets of the heart—it creates more mysteries than it removes, and in the long run it aggravates itself into the greatest mystery of all.

Second, the non-spiritual argument has strengthened the conviction that any creed which discourages the pure aspirations or destroys the honourable hopes of mankind is presumptively untrue. It will not be denied that in the human heart there is a "pleasing hope, a fond desire, a longing after immortality." This aspiration brings the most elevating and chastening influences to bear upon human thinking and human activity, and is, on that account, likely to be the expression of a profound spiritual reality. Its extinction would not only leave a great void in the heart; it

would also remove encouragements and restraints which are needful to the highest development of strength and the most healthful discipline of character. Granted that goodness should be valued and pursued for its own sake, yet goodness itself is impaired alike in quality and in quantity by being withdrawn from the infinite relationships and bearings which are recognised by Christianity ; it is degraded within measurable and even variable limits, and is in danger of being treated with cunning manipulation and used for selfish purposes. Not only so ; immunities are granted to vice, so long as it is wily enough to escape the clutches of the law, by assuring the vicious man that when he has played out his last trick he is as well off as the man who has vainly troubled himself with a conscience, seeing that they both pass into everlasting darkness and silence. If in the common affairs of life men are moved by hope, it is but a fuller application of the same law which is found in the influence of Christian aspiration, the one being the limited, the other the unlimited term. Besides this, any doctrine that promises the universal establishment of righteousness—which asserts the coming of judgment upon every form of evil, and the raising up of every virtue that has been trampled upon—commends itself to the understanding and the conscience of man as a doctrine that is presumptively true. It is, in fact, the one doctrine that is needed as the inspiration of honest men and the defence of all holy and generous interests. Under its authority and consolation men can wait hopefully, and whilst they are waiting they can urge the judgments of God upon the attention of evil-doers. Withdraw this doctrine, and it is impossible to deny that a great loss has been inflicted upon the human family, a loss which must be the more keenly felt because all the arrangements of civilised society have been pointed in the very direction of its truthfulness, that is to say, society has been aiming, in all its encouragements of virtue and all its repressions of vice, to generate a social religion, and establish a commonwealth in which reprobacy shall be reduced to a minimum. But these local attempts have been founded upon what appeared to be a universal authority, and have drawn their sanctions from it. Deny that authority or impair it, and you loosen the bonds of social organisation, and discourage every hope of perfect union and world-wide peace. Christian doctrine

cannot be simply ignored or banished. It has wrought itself too thoroughly into the living tissue of society to be removed without necessitating the most intricate and serious consequences. Not only will there be required a reconstruction of society as it exists in Christendom, but every man who has been moved by Christian aspiration will, so to speak, have to divest himself of his old consciousness, and start his whole life from a new centre ; in a word, he will have to give the lie to himself, and put to silence all the voices of his own nature which have hitherto been to him as the echoes of the voice of God.

With that wonderful completeness which we have pointed out as belonging to the Bible, the very ground of scientists, so far as they dwell upon the materiality and limitations of human life, has been anticipated in the pages of revelation. It was not reserved for the microscope to find out man's weakness, or to teach him to look to the plants of the field for types of his frailty and perishableness. It might be supposed, from much that has passed under our review, that not until quite recently was it known that there is a protoplasm common to man and to the fading grass ; a quotation or two will show how mistaken would be this supposition : "As for man, his days are as grass : as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone ; and the place thereof shall know it no more" ; "He cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down" ; "We all do fade as a leaf." The Bible does not leave man without humiliation as to the tenure of earthly life : The Lord "knoweth our frame ; he remembereth that we are dust" ; "He remembered that they were but flesh ; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again" ; "What is your life ? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Humiliation enough, long before Mr. Huxley came "with those not rare articles a nettle and a microscope." On the other hand, the Bible never fails to magnify the inner and better life of man, thus : "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof : but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" ; "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour" ; "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" ; "It doth not yet appear what we shall be ; we shall be like him ; for we shall see

him as he is"; "We know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Dr. Tyndall, whose writings cannot be read without the highest advantage, does, indeed, allow that something more than pure materialism is needed to meet the whole circle of human want. With great beauty, he says: "The circle of human nature is not complete without the arc of feeling and emotion. The lilies of the field have a value for us beyond their botanical ones—a certain lightening of the heart accompanies the declaration that 'Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' The sound of the village bell which comes mellowed from the valley to the traveller upon the hill has a value beyond its acoustical one. The setting sun, when it mantles with the bloom of roses the Alpine snows, has a value beyond its optical one. Round about the intellect sweeps the horizon of emotions from which all our noblest impulses are derived." Yet, in the face of these admissions, Dr. Tyndall would, unless we greatly misinterpret his meaning, take special care to exclude theology as a possible help to the full satisfaction of human nature. It is not to the theologian, but the poet, that he extends the hand of welcome: "I think the poet will have a great part to play in the future of the world. To him it is given for a long time to come to fill those stores which the recession of the theologic tide has left exposed; to him, when he rightly understands his mission and does not flinch from the tonic discipline which it assuredly demands, we have a right to look for that heightening and brightening of life which so many of us need. He ought to be the interpreter of that power which, as

‘Jehovah, Jove, or Lord,’

has hitherto filled and strengthened the human heart." Such an admission has meaning in it, and hope, notwithstanding the dislike, latent rather than fully expressed, of theological study and suggestion. There are not wanting men, whose intellectual power Dr. Tyndall himself would be the first to recognise and honour, who believe that the "Poet" has already come with the "interpretation," and the solace. What if they be right? Dr.

Tyndall is longing for a poet ; other men, whom he would call great and good, think that in Jesus Christ they have found the "Interpreter" of that power which has been named "Jehovah, Jove, or Lord." Certainly Jesus called him by the name of Father, and spoke much of his love and care. No tenderer words were ever spoken ; no deeper words ever challenged intellectual attention ; and as for noble deeds, his life is full of them. What the "poet" can do more than Jesus did in the interpretation of God, we cannot even imagine. When he blessed little children, and gave lost women a new beginning of life ; when he brought the prodigal home, and delivered the poor from the spoiler ; and did all this as the will of his Father,—it is not to be wondered at that some bruised and despairing hearts should have taken him as their Poet, their Teacher, and their Lord. It seemed as if he was the very Refuge which men needed, and a very present help in time of trouble. His voice always sounded as if it *might* have been God's own ; there was so much pathos in it, so much real lovingkindness, and such a sounding of something far off and unknown. Possibly, too, those outcast women may have seen further than some proud thinkers, and have known through their very sin and its mortal pain more of Christ's real nature than could ever be known by self-righteousness and supposed infallibility. Shall we, then, cast off this Man thoughtlessly, and bear our sorrow in darkness, until a poet come with new songs and unheard rhythms ? The question is serious enough, and much may depend upon the answer. We believe that poets will come generation after generation until the end of time, but we have no hope that any of them will call God by a tenderer name than Father, or propose a higher obedience than purity and love.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, teach us thy greatness through thy goodness, lest we be affrighted, and become as men in whom there is no strength. We would see thy glory, but our eyes could not bear the light; may we therefore see thy mercy, and become accustomed to the milder glory. Show us that thy pity is great, that thy love itself is glorious, and thus, little by little, as we are able to bear it, do thou continue and complete the revelation of thyself to our wondering and grateful hearts. Thou dost grow upon us like an increasing light; continue so to do until there be in us no darkness at all, our whole life beautiful with the presence of thy glory, cleansed and purified by the fire of thy righteousness.

We bless thee for thy great care over us: our bones are thine; thou dost set them down one by one in thy record book: the very hairs of our head are all numbered; thou dost count our steps and hedge about our way, and with manifold defences and innumerable ministries dost thou train us in this ever-wonderful life. We cannot tell what to-morrow may bring forth; therefore dost thou call upon us to crowd our energy into the present moment, and make it hot with noble and strenuous endeavour to be good and to do right. Help us to dismiss to-morrow from our thoughts; may it have no place in our dreamings; may we be men of to-day, urgent and rapid as those who are upon the king's business.

Thou hast given us houses to dwell in; thou dost spread our table morning, noon, and night; a hundred springs of joy and comfort thou dost cause to burst forth around us. Thou dost keep the roof upon our head, even when the storm breaks upon it with utmost fury. Behold, thou dost kindle our fire; thy hand is round about the light of our lamp. We therefore still bless thee with new hymns and ever-enlarging and heightening songs; yea, our whole life would become one swelling psalm, rising unto heaven, expressing our daily love, our continual and inviolable trust. By the grace of God we are what we are. Thou didst fill up the pit into which our feet had well nigh fallen. Thou didst bring down the high places which made us fear—behold, thou didst smite the mighty archers of Kedar, and make those who boasted themselves therein as hirelings who had but a year to live. Thou rulest the ragings of the sea; thou makest stars that fit the darkness of the night; thou dost cause thy chariot wheels to become eyes, fierce amid their brightness, to all pursuing enemies; thou dost find a path for us in the wilderness, and rivers break out in unexpected places. Thou art worthy to receive from us glory and power and majesty and riches; hear the ascriptions of our burning gratitude and return the same into our hearts as heavenly benedictions.

We bless thee that we are here, for this is none other than the house of

God and the gate of heaven. We know the language of the place; it has become as our native tongue by its familiar tenderness. Behold, here we meet a great cloud of witnesses, the sainted and honoured dead who are round about the throne, and are looking on with eyes that never tire nor sleep. The Lord grant unto us all the power and inspiration of the most sacred memories that gather around the holy place! We remember our sin, but in the presence of thy grace it is as nothing. Where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. Thou dost cause life to overflow death, and immortality thou dost cause to outshine all the mean lustre of this present moment. So thou dost meet our sin with the infinite grace that is in Christ Jesus. The blood of Jesus Christ, thy Son, cleanseth from all sin. We leave our burden at the Cross; we shall never find it more.

Hear the hearts that are full of prayer, that cannot utter their desires because of the vehemency of their secret emotion. Hear the parent who wonders where the wanderer is, and would offer him a thousand welcomes if he would return. Hear the mother who must live in her sighs, because she dare not put them into speech, so keen and poignant her yearnings after those who are out of the way. Hear thou the unuttered desires of the penitent, the man who would return if he could find some secret door by which to come stealthily into his father's dishonoured house; find such a way for him thyself, this very day, and make this the birthday of his soul, the beginning of a blessed immortality. Hear us for our loved ones who are sick, mighty Physician, tender Nurse, go into all our sick chambers, and by the brightness of thy presence bring healing to the souls that must soon quit their tenements of clay.

The Lord look upon the old man tottering over his staff and looking into his grave; the Lord's own fingers touch the cheek of the babe cooing and crowing in his cradle; the Lord's eyes be for good upon the bent old woman, who has seen the measure of her time and longs for the city of rest! The Lord break the bones of every evil man and turn his counsel into night and confusion and trouble, and bring him thereby not to ruin, but to contrition! The Lord unsettle the foundations of every iniquitous throne; the Lord baffle the decrees and the counsels of every wicked empire and prosper every man that endeavours to do good with simplicity and earnestness!

The Lord hear us in these things! We are always in his arms; may he now draw us still more closely to his heart! Amen.

THE UNKNOWABLE GOD.

"God is great, and we know him not."—JOB xxxvi. 26.

GOD—Unknown, Unknowable; even so, yet not the less the one Reality, and the one Energy of the universe. What it is possible to *know* it must be possible to explain, to put into an equal number of words, which, being all set together, sum themselves into the exact measure of the thing that is known. What can be known can of course be contained by the faculty which

knows it. The vessel is of necessity larger than its contents. It, then, any faculty of mine knows God, that faculty contains God, and is in that sense larger than God, which is impossible and absurd. Whatever I can know is, by the very fact that I can know it, less than I am ; bigger, it may be, as to mere size in length and breadth, a huge disc that glares with light, or a globe flying fast, yet with speed that can be set down in so many ciphers or lines of ciphers on a child's slate, so clearly that we can say : It is so much an hour the great wings fly, and not one mile more. What is that but mere bigness, an appeal to our easily excited wonder, a Size that shakes our pride and bids us mind our ways, or a weight may fall upon us from the sky ? It is nothing but infinitised mud, nothing but an ascertainable quantity and intensity of fire—a wide and high stair leading to nothing !

Unknown—Unknowable. Thanks. I am tired of the Known and the Knowable, tired of saying this star is fifty millions of miles in circumference, that star is ninety millions of miles farther off than the moon, and yonder planet is five million times larger than the earth. It is mere gossip in polysyllables, getting importance by hugeness, something that would never be named in inches, and that owes its fame to the word *millions*. It is so that men want to make a mouthful of God ! A great mouthful, no doubt, say even to the extent of super-millions squared and cubed into a whole slateful of ciphers, but pronounceable in words ! Failing this, they suppose they have destroyed him by saying he is Unknowable and Unknown. It makes me glad to think he is ! That any One or any Thing should be unknowable and should yet invite and stimulate inquiry is educationally most hopeful. O soul of mine, there are grand times in store for thee ! I cannot rattle my staff against the world's boundary wall, and say, The End !—Poor staff ! It thrusts itself into a cloud ; it goes over the edge ; it is like to be pulled out of my hand by gravitation from another centre stronger than the earth's core, a gravitation that pulls even the earth itself and keeps it from reeling and falling. Yes, prying staff, thou canst touch nothing but a most ghostly emptiness. Soul of man, if thou wouldst truly see—see the Boundless, see the Possible, see God—go into the dark when and where the darkness is thickest. That is the mighty and solemn sanctuary

of vision. The light is vulgar in some uses. It shows the mean and vexing detail of space and life with too gross a palpableness, and frets the sensitiveness of the eyes. I must find the healing darkness that has never been measured off into millions and paraded as a nameable quantity of surprise and mystery. *Deus absconditus*. God hideth himself, oftenest in the light; he *touches* the soul in the gloom and vastness of night, and the soul, being true in its intent and wish, answers the touch without a shudder or a blush. It is even so that God comes to me. He does not come through man's high argument, a flash of human wit, a sudden and audacious answer to an infinite enigma, or a toilsome reply to some high mental challenge. His path is through the pathless darkness—without a footprint to show where he stepped; through the forest of the night he comes; and when he comes the brightness is all within! My God—unknown and unknowable—cannot be chained as a Prisoner of logic, or delivered into the custody of a theological proposition, or figured into literal art. Shame be the portion of those who have given him a setting within the points of the compass, who have robed him in cloth of their own weaving, and surnamed him at the bidding of their cold and narrow fancy! For myself, I know that I cannot know him, that I have a joy wider than knowledge, a conception that domes itself above my best thinking, as the sky domes itself in infinite pomp and lustre above the earth whose beauty it creates. God! God! God! best defined when undefined; a Fire that may not be touched; a Life too great for shape or image; a Love for which there is no equal name. Who is he? God. What is he? God. Of whom begotten? God. He is at once the question and the answer, the self-balance, the All.

We have tried to build our way up to him by using many words with some cunning and skill. We have thought to tempt him into our cognition by the free use of flattering adjectives. Surely, said we, he will pour his heart's wine into the golden goblets which we hold to catch the sacred stream. We have called him Creator, Sovereign, Father; then Infinite Creator, Eternal Sovereign, Gracious Father, as if we could build up our word-bricks to heaven and surprise the Unknown and the Unknowable in his solitude, and look upon him face to face. We

have come near to blasphemy herein. What wonder had we been thrust through with a dart! We have thought our Yesterday roomy enough to hold God's Eternity, and have offered him with every show of abounding sufficiency the hospitality of our ever-changing words as a medium of revelation. *Our* words! Words that come and go like unstable fashions. Words that die of very age; words that cannot be accepted unanimously in all their suggestions and relations even by two men. Into these words we have invited God, and because he cannot come into them but as a devouring fire, we have stood back in offence and unbelief. God! God! God! ever hidden, ever present, ever distant, ever near; a Ghost, a Breath, making the knees knock in terror, ripping open a grave at the very feet of our pleasure, a mocking laugh at the feast, filling all space like the light, yet leaving room for all his creatures; a Terror, a Hope—Undefinable, Unknowable, Irresistible, Immeasurable. God is a Spirit!

Undefinable, Unknown, Unknowable, Invisible, Incomprehensible, grim negatives, emptinesses that deceive us by their vast hollowness, and nothing more, are these surly words. The wrong word is to blame for the wrong conclusion. We have chosen the very worst word in our haste, and have needlessly humbled ourselves in doing so. We have made a wall of the word when we might have made it into six wings, twain to cover the face, twain to cover the feet, and twain with which to fly. Instead of Unknowable, Invisible, Incomprehensible, say Superknowable, Supervisible, Supercomprehensible, and at once the right point of view is reached and the mystery is made luminous. From the *Unknowable* I turn away humiliated and discouraged; from the *Superknowable* I return humbled, yet inspired. The *Unknowable* says: Fool, why bruise thy knuckles in knocking at the final granite as if it were a door that could be opened? The *Superknowable* says: There is something larger than thy intelligence; a Secret, a Force, a Beginning, a God! Evermore is the difficulty in the lame *word* and not in the solemn truth. We make no progress in religion whilst we keep to our crippled feet; in its higher aspects and questionings it is not a road to walk upon, it is an open firmament to fly in. Alas for his progress who mistakes crutches for wings! Yet this absurdity has so recommended itself to our coldness as to win the name of

prudence, sobriety, and self-suppression. We have lost the broad and mighty pinions that found their way to heaven's gate, and the eye of burning love that looked steadfastly into the sacred cloud. We have now taken to walking, and our lame feet pick their uncertain way over such stones as Unknown, Unknowable, Invisible, Incomprehensible, and we finish our toilsome journey exactly where we began it. Enthusiasm sees God. Love sees God. Fire sees God. But we have escaped the revealing, because sympathetic, fire, and have built our prudent religion upon the sand. On the sand! Think of it! So we go to it, and walk around it, and measure it, and break it up into propositions, and placard it on church walls, and fight about it with infinite clamour and some spitefulness. My soul, amid all Unknowableness, Incomprehensibleness, and other vain and pompous nothings, hold fast to the faith that thou canst *know* God, and yet know nothing merely *about* him; know him by love and pureness, and not know *about* him by intellectual art or theological craft.

Invisible! This is what the Bible itself says. The invisibleness of God is not a scientific discovery; it is a Biblical revelation; it is a part of the Bible. "No man hath seen God at any time"—"No man can see God and live." This is the difficulty of all life, and the higher the life the higher the difficulty. No man can see *himself* and live! He can see his incarnation, but his very *self*—the pulse that makes him a man—he has never seen, he can never see! Anatomy says it has never found the soul, and adds, "Therefore there is no soul." The reasoning o'erleaps itself and takes away its own life by rude violence. Has anatomy found *Genius*? Has the surgical knife opened the chamber in which *Music* sings and seen the Singer? Or has anatomy laid its finger upon *Imagination* and held it up, saying, "Behold, the mighty wizard"? But if there is no soul, simply because anatomy has never found one, then there is no genius, no music, no imagination, no chivalry, no honour, no sympathy, because the surgeon's knife has failed to come upon them in wounding and hacking the human frame! Anatomise the dead poet and the dead ass, and you will find as much genius in the one as in the other; *therefore* there is no genius! Who that valued his life would set his foot on such a bridge as that rickety "therefore"? But some

men will venture upon any bridge that seems to lead away from God ; a very simple anatomy will find the reason ; it is because "they DO NOT LIKE to retain God in their hearts"—it is not because of intellectual superiority, but because of moral distaste. An internal cancer accounts for this invincible aversion.

Unknown ; Unknowable ; truly, yet not on that account unusable and unprofitable. That is a vital distinction. The master of science humbly avows that he has not a theory of magnetism ; does he therefore ignore it, or decline to inquire into its uses ? Does he reverently write its name with a big M, and run away from it shaken and whitened by a great fear ? Verily he is no such fool. He actually *uses* what he does not *understand*. I will accept his example and bring it to bear upon the religious life. I do not scientifically know God ; the solemn term does not come within the analysis which is available to me ; God is great, and I know him not : yet the term has its practical *uses* in life, and into those broad and obvious uses all men may inquire. What part does the God of the Bible play in the life of the man who accepts him and obeys him with all the inspiration and diligence of love ? Any creed that does not come down easily into the daily life to purify and direct it is by so much imperfect and useless. I cannot read the Bible without seeing that God (as there revealed) has ever moved his believers in the direction of *courage* and *sacrifice*. These two terms are multitudinous, involving others of kindred quality, and spreading themselves over the whole space of the upper life. In the direction of courage, not mere animal courage, for then the argument might be matched by gods many, yet still *gods*, though their names be spelt without capitals ; but *moral* courage, noble heroism, fierce rebuke of personal and national corruption, sublime and pathetic judgment of all good and all evil. The God-idea made mean men valiant soldier-prophets ; it broadened the piping voice of the timid inquirer into the thunder of the national teacher and leader ; for brass it brought gold, and for iron silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron ; instead of the thorn it brought up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier the myrtle-tree, and it made the bush burn with fire. Wherever the God-idea took complete possession of the mind every faculty was lifted up to a new capacity, and borne on to heroic attempts and conquests. The saints who received it

subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions; quenched the violence of fire, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Any idea that so inspired in man life and hope is to be examined with reverent care. The *quality* of the courage determines its value, and the value of the idea which excited and sustained it. What is true of the courage is true also of the *sacrifice* which has ever followed the acceptance of the God-idea. Not the showy and fanatical sacrifice of mere blood-letting; many a Juggernaut, great and small, drinks the blood of his devotees; but spiritual discipline, self-renunciation, the esteeming of others better than one's self, such a suppression of the self-thought as to amount to an obliteration of every motive and purpose that can be measured by any single personality, such are the practical *uses* of the God-idea. It is not a barren sentiment. It is not a coloured vapour or a scented incense, lulling the brain into partial stupor or agitating it with mocking dreams: it arouses courage; it necessitates self sacrifice; it touches the imagination as with fire; it gives a wide and solemn outlook to the whole nature; it gives a deeper tone to every thought; it sanctifies the universe; it makes heaven possible. Unknown—Unknowable. Yes, but not therefore unusable or unprofitable.

Say this God was dreamed by human genius. Be it so. Make him a creature of *fancy*. What then? The man who made, or dreamed, or otherwise projected *such* a God must be the author of some *other* work of equal or approximate importance. Produce it! That is the sensible reply to so bold a blasphemy. Singular if man has made a Jehovah and then has taken to the drudgery of making oil paintings, and ink poems, and huts to live in. Where is the congruity? A man says he kindled the *sun*, and when asked for his proof he strikes a *match* which the wind blows out! Is the evidence sufficient? Or a man says that he has covered the earth with all the green and gold of summer, and, when challenged to prove it, he produces a wax flower which melts in his hands! Is the proof convincing? The God of the Bible calls for the *production* of other gods—gods wooden, gods stony, gods ill-bred, gods well-shaped, and done up skilfully for market uses; from his heavens he laughs at them, and

from his high throne he holds them in derision. He is not afraid of competitive gods. They try to climb to his sublimity, and only get high enough to break their necks in a sharp fall. Again and again I demand that the second effort of human genius bear some obvious relation to the first. The sculptor accepts the challenge, so does the painter, so does the musician; why should the Jehovah-dreamer be an exception to the common rule of confirmation and proof? We wait for the evidence. We insist upon having it; and, that we may not waste our time in idle expectancy, we will meanwhile call upon God, saying, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven!"

PRAYER.

O THOU who didst never begin and who canst never end, All in all, more than heart can dream or tongue can tell, we are now about to speak of thee, and to tell the nothing that we know. Thou canst make our hearts burn within us; that burning shall be the purification of our souls and the chief comfort of our lives. Come to us, not in terror, but in love, not in the wrath which shakes the universe, but in the pity which saves the world. We have heard the crashing of thy thunder and would never hear it any more; henceforward do thou mercifully be unto us as the silent dew or the quiet light, and our souls shall live in thy forbearance. Jesus, save us! Jesus, cleanse us! Blood of the Lamb, take our sins away! God of gods and Lord of lords, by the showing of thyself make the universe look small and make our life a throb of thine own eternity. Deliver us from mistaken notions concerning thyself, and let us see all thy love in Christ Jesus thy dear Son. Surely thou art our heart's perplexity by reason of thy mystery, and our heart's supreme delight by reason of thy continual grace. We know that we have wronged thee by our mistaken views of thy character, yet dost thou gently correct us by many revelations of power and grace. Continue thy holy ministry in our hearts until all dross is burnt away and there is left only the fine gold of true wisdom. O Christ, cleanse us! Holy Spirit, make us like unto God himself! Amen.

THE PERSONAL GOD.

"The Lord God, even my God."—I CHRON. xxviii. 20.

EVERY man has what practically amounts to a god of his own. That is to say, he has a conception of God which no other mind has seized, and that conception forms the living centre of his personal religion. There are several gods in Christendom which I have renounced, and against which every honest man should, from any point of view, inveigh with strong indignation. Three examples occur to me at this moment. (1) There is a god that specifically foreordains so many people to be saved and so many to be lost; this god calls upon all men to be saved, well knowing that the call will neither be heard nor answered, because of an arbitrary decree which he himself has issued. This god I abhor and renounce, and I treat his power with scorn and

defiance. No such god could ever secure my confidence or tempt me into other than mocking prayer. (2) Then there is another god, in many respects the exact contrary of this. He is infinitely soft; he is "all tears"; he is constantly misspending his love and complaining of the daily waste; his life is a tumultuous sentiment, rushing like an unbanked river into any swamp that will receive it and turn it into fetid and barren greenness. This god I pity and avoid. There is further (3) a kind of gentleman-god who is the refined and respectable patron of a certain type of churches. He never attends any other place of worship; he is nothing if not genteel; he submits himself sabbatically to the mild encomiums of sundry feeble persons who use him for professional purposes and never make any vulgar or exciting allusions to him.

My God is wholly unlike these three idols. Were there but these three to choose from, I should in very deed be a godless man. My heart goes out towards another God, about whom I will say what little I can, the most being less than nothing, and the highest love being but dead coldness when spoken in the words of man. What I know about this God I have learned solely from the Son of the carpenter. He seemed to be a long time in saying anything about God. The first time he spoke of him, except by way of quotation, he did not call him God, or Lord, or Most High, or Eternal; he called him "your Father which is in heaven"! Not that he disavowed the more solemn name, for the next time he turned to the topic he said "God's throne." After long companionship with the Son of the carpenter, and even much loving intimacy with his most secret heart, I have come to know something about this Father who has a throne, and this God who is a Father.

Intellectually my God is as unthinkable as mathematically the horizon is immeasurable. We can lay one end of the tape upon the earth, but we cannot lay the other end on the horizon, yet the horizon is visible, and is just—*yonder*! But because God is unthinkable it does not follow that he is not to be thought about. The fatal mistake of some thinkers seems to lie just there. The unthinkable is not something contrary to thought, but is something above thought, as the immeasurable is not a quantity which disproves figures, but exceeds them. Astronomy gives us a universe whose orbit is so stupendous that any section of any

circle ever measured by mathematics appears upon its circumference as merely a straight line. An unthinkable universe, yet objectively here, undeniable, most palpable, and not wholly without use! I like to think about it until thought falls into a dream, and the dream is too grand for words and becomes a dumbly religious amazement. If I think only of my own parish, I become small; of my own country only, a selfish patriot; of the universe, I heighten with the infinite idea. This experience has its inexpressible counterpart in religion. I am incomplete and restless without God. I grope for him in a great darkness, and my heart is pained with bitter crying and a very agony of desire. You must give me a God, or I will create one. Idolatry is philosophical; in its most tragic bloodiness it is but the desperation of a life that is nearly Divine. The God and Father of Jesus Christ fills me with ineffable satisfaction, not that he falls wholly within the lines of my intellectual capacity, but is as the sun which fills the earth with its glory and yet holds in reserve infinitely more than the earth can receive. It is open to others to call this phantasy on my part. I might call it phantasy, too, and endeavour to quench it, but that I am the better for it, coming out of the enrapturing reverie as I do with a sacred contempt for all meanness and a burning desire to help and bless all other human life. Such a phantasy is not without substance, and therefore is no phantasy, though seeming to be such to men whose intellectual guests are always less than themselves. If it perished like a cloud, I might value it at the price of a cloud, but so long as it constrains me to do good, to think nobly, to give generously, and to suffer patiently, I must encourage it, though it be called by no other name than phantasy.

Another thought. It is a mistake to suppose that knowledge comes to us solely through what are known as intellectual processes. Some things we know intuitively, some sympathetically, some experimentally. Some knowledge is, so to say, startled into us by sudden distress or sudden joy. No image or super-scription of reasoning is upon it, yet it rules us like a revelation, and it is consciously at the peril of a great loss that we refuse it place and utterance in our life. As human education is something both before school and after it—the school being merely a bracket in the opening of youth—so knowledge, in its highest

reach and quality, comes before reasoning and continues after it, without any law or measure which science has yet determined. I put it down, therefore, as one line in my creed that man's knowledge is not the product or issue of his intellect alone.

The most powerful—may I not say the most tremendous?—hold which God has upon me is in a moral direction. He is in very deed a holy God. He cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. He gives me a final standard of right and wrong. If I could get rid of this God, I could easily get rid of all inconvenient morality. He will not allow me to yield to the temptation of circumstances, or to pit one suggestion against another in any argument whose conclusions would fraudulently enrich me, or separate my individual benefit from the security and completeness of the broad commonwealth. There is a law of righteousness in his mouth, a sword of justice is in his hand, and the whole royalty of his throne is set against all selfishness and corruption. This is my God. He is the continual torment of my sin, and the continual hope of my penitence. I am a better man with him than I could possibly be without him, and that is a test which no false religion can bear. Without him my morality would be a calculation, a public attitude, or a social investment; it might often have the semblance of the rarest virtue, and for all purposes of casual criticism might successfully float through the passing hour: but a vital and invincible morality it would not be; it would not wear well; any unequal strain might break it, and show the inner craft of an artificial exterior.

These two aspects of God give me all that I need in the way of intellectual speculation and moral rest. My mind is filled with the grandeur of the conception, and its highest moods are promised an ever-enlarging delight and satisfaction. On the other hand, I find the rest which every mind must ardently desire when looking at the collisions and tumults of all time. I feel that the end is not yet, and that my judgment would be as a word spoken out of season. More than this, I am assured that the world must be more to its Maker than ever it can be to me, and therefore that if he can keep the sunny roof over its stormy scenes, it would be imbecility and impiety on my part to

complain of its inequalities and misadventures. I rest in the almightiness of God, and my patience is ennobled into a religion by the confidence that all things are working together by measures and compensations which must result in universal contentment and rest. Again and again, therefore, I am shown that my creed is not a phantasm, but a reality, not a dream which pleases one set of my powers, but a discipline that puts upon me great strains and summons me to gracious labours.

This Unthinkable and Holy God I humbly receive from Jesus Christ, the Son of the carpenter. "He only hath revealed him." He claims that he came from the bosom of the Father, and my experience of his grand and ever-ennobling teaching confirms the probability of his having done so. More than this : so far as the human intellect can go, Jesus Christ is not, in his word and works, distinguishable from God. Whether beyond the point attainable by the mind any inequality discovers itself we cannot now know. To my mind Jesus Christ is one with God. His words are unfathomable in meaning, though direct and immediate in the holy uses of comfort and illumination. More and more do I grow in the conviction that any God that cannot be made immediately available by the very simplest descriptions or definitions is neither the Father nor the Saviour of men. Though he be great, yet must he have respect unto the lowly ; to the lowly he must accommodate himself in his revelations, and in no wise must he shut himself up as the monopoly of professional interpretation or sacerdotal pretension. These conditions are all realised in the God of Jesus Christ. God is love. God is light. God is life. God is a Spirit. God is Father. No other God ever admitted of such easy translation into the speech of men. **This is MY God.**

GOD, THE EXPLANATION OF ALL THINGS.

IF you ask me how I know that there is a God, if I tell you in reply that the Bible says so, you may very well be dissatisfied with the answer. You would indeed be entitled to say, "That may be so, but who gave the Bible authority to say anything of the kind?" I should be reasoning in a circle if I should find that there was a God because the Bible said so, and that there was a revelation because God had inspired it. That would be wholly a circular movement, altogether inadequate, and wholly mocking and unsatisfactory. As a Christian teacher, I set forth no such plea. I do not begin at a metaphysical point at all. The method of argument which I shall apply to the whole line of Christian evidence in this discourse is this: Here are certain facts; account for them. In other words, here is a lock; open it. Instead of saying, "There is a God; go out and prove it," I will say, "Here are certain facts, ten thousand strong; account for them." Instead of saying that there is a Providence watching over us all, I will say, "Here is my life—you know it: strange mysterious, tumultuous, many-coloured: comedy having its laugh cut short by sudden tragedy, tragedy startled into momentary relaxation by unexpected comedy: diversity of temper, engagement, habitude, destiny—here are the facts; account for, them." Instead of saying to you, "There is a book which is inspired," I shall say nothing of the kind. I shall, as a literary surveyor, go over the book and report upon it to you. I will tell you what the book is, in its contents, in its spirit, in its history, in its purpose, and I shall ask you to account for it. So I am not going to ask any favour of any man. I am not going even to ask you to admit a metaphysical axiom, saying, "Let it be granted, so and so"; I shall take the facts, you shall find them, and I will pile them up one on the top of another, and ask you what the next step is.

Now this is the purely scientific method. We begin with facts,

and we ask for the explanation—no man can object to that. You can leave them unaccounted for? No, not as a scientific man. Unaccounted for! Any fool could do that, but you are a man of knowledge. You can go up to a certain point and then wheel round and leave the explanation unattempted? No. Let the vulgar do that. Let men of science be fearless. The challenge of the Nazarene called Christ was, "Knock, ask, seek; batter the door till it opens." That is my Leader, my fearless, chivalrous Master. I will bind you, therefore, to be scientific right through and through; you shall not cease when you like; you shall not shut up the school when you think it time to go, but you shall keep it open as long as there is a single ray of light in the western sky. The spirit of the age says, "Prove all things, push the scientific inquiry to its utmost extent, be deterred by nothing, ask and demand the answer." I accept the challenge, and I ask, if you have gathered the facts together, how do you account for them? How does the sun come to shine? How do men come to different lots and destinies in life? How comes it that there is no man who has seen the wind? Why has no cunning hand made a glass that can show to-morrow? You see I am dealing strictly with facts. I have botanists, geologists, astronomers, sociologists, and a whole host of others running to every point of the compass to bring in facts. I am waiting till they get them all completed, and when they are complete, I shall say, "Account for them." That, I take it, is practical.

Now, as a mere matter of fact, some persons have ventured to say, "The facts of the universe, its coherence, magnitude, colour, light, beauty, proportion, harmony, utility—the facts of the universe, put them under what names you please, are to be accounted for by the doctrine, In the beginning, God." Do I take the answer, finally, simply, because it happens to have been given? Nothing of the sort. A certain kind of mind might say, "If we say that God made all things, the question will arise, Who made God?" So be it: it is a very proper question; push it, urge it, repeat it, and get an answer if you can. Do you think I am to be frightened, as a Christian teacher, by the suggestion that if I say God made all things, somebody will say, Who made God? It is a grand question; repeat it, urge it, vehemently and wisely, when you have got the reply, make it known.

But there is a way of treating the suggestion which seems to me to be rational, and most practical. You say God made all things, that God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, merciful, wise, and kind beyond all human conceptions of his attributes. Do I believe you because you say so, or because the Bible says so? No. What do I do? I try whether the answer covers the question, and does so satisfactorily. You have been abroad, and you have somehow lost your key, and you cannot open the lock under which all your travelling possessions are. A friend says, "Here is a bunch of keys for you." You can take three courses in reference to that bunch of keys. You can say, "Where does the whitesmith live, what is his name, and how came he to be a whitesmith, that made those keys?" That would be a very philosophical inquiry to make. Or you may say, "By what authority did any man presume to make a bunch of keys? Who gave him liberty to do so?" That would be a magnificent assertion of the independence of the human mind. Or you can try the keys. That would be most humbling, but very common sense. I propose to try the key; if it fits, I will keep it. I am simply dealing with the suggestion now as a suggestion. Does Omnipotence even seem to account for creation? Does Providence even seem to account for what is seen in daily life? Does Infinite Love even seem to account for the sparing of many who have outraged all obligation and honour? Is there anything in life—anything of injustice, disparity, inequality—to justify the suggestion that there must be a final judgment and an allotment of rewards and punishments? I confess that the suggestion is equal to the occasion, and that no other suggestion, theory, hypothesis, or conjecture—I am treating it simply under these categories, you observe—so completely covers the whole case as the doctrine that in the beginning, God—and that God creates, rules, sustains, and redeems. I therefore take your suggestion, and say, "Better than any other it accounts for the facts."

Suppose it should be objected that this suggestion still leaves a good many inquiries to be answered, what then? So does science. It is not as if any one theory accounted for everything. The scientific man comes to a point at which he says, "I stop there." The religious man comes to a point at which he says the

same thing, the difference being that the scientific man has explained nothing, accounted for nothing, beyond the most visible and limited line. The religious man suggests a Father, a Ruler, a Sovereign, and has found it somewhere written, that is yet to be tested, that what we know not now we shall know hereafter. Taking the two suggestions simply as such, I say the one is larger than the other—deeper, grander; touches points in my life left untouched by the other, and therefore by so much it is worthy of further investigation.

Take this same illustration of the lock and key. Do I say I believe that this key will open the lock because I have been told it will? Certainly not; that would be foolish reasoning indeed. I put the key into the lock and turn it, and thus my faith stands upon fact. This is exactly what I do with the suggestion, In the beginning, God. I retain my manhood, what I call my independence—no book is allowed to take this from me; every book that is good addresses these facts in me, consults and honours them, and therefore I open the book, called pre-eminently *The Book*, and it says, "In the beginning, God." I take the suggestion as a rational man; in the first place it is only a suggestion: by-and-by it may grow into a revelation.

I have a great and cunningly contrived lock called the universe, and the question is how to open it. I cannot tell. It is a grand lock, and I should like to open it. The Bible says, "I can give you the key of that lock." Then I say, "You are a bold book, and boldness is an attribute of truth." Do I stop there and say I believe there is a key because I have read a book which says there is one? Verily, no. I say to the book, whatever its name may be, "Where is the key?" When the Bible says, "The key is God, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, righteous, merciful, holy, just, brighter than the light, more patient than motherhood, more pitiful than fatherhood, full of compassion, and most longsuffering," I take the key, I press it into the lock, I find that it opens the lock, wholly and easily—what do I do? I kiss the book, I love it, I call it God's book, I meditate therein day and night. Have you a better reason? Let me have it: I will try it exactly in the same way—only it must cover all the ground, it must be available night and day, it must not be subject to climatic changes, it

must not succumb to atmospheric effects, it must keep time on the Alps, and keep time in the valleys—must that suggestion of yours. I wait for it. It shall be treated with the profoundest respect.

But suppose it should be further said, "That may be the happiest intellectual suggestion yet given ; it may be the brightest intellectual guess which even genius in its most inspiring and elated moods has suggested. But it may be only an intellectual suggestion, and its originality may be one day eclipsed." Very good ; I anticipate that objection, thus : If this book gave me only an intellectual idea of the construction and government of the universe, I dare not accept any intellectual answer as final. Intellect is never self-complete. If it were only a clever guess—the cleverest guess—I should suspect it on account of its very ability. How then am I seconded and backed in use of this key ? I will tell you. The Bible does not allow itself to be thus easily nonsuited in the court of human investigation, by the suggestion that it is very clever, a very brilliant reply, a magnificent guess, and nothing more. The answer of the Bible is not a merely intellectual success. What kind of God does the Bible bring to open the lock of the universe ? A moral God—a God who lays a moral claim upon me—a God who is pained by my intellectual admiration of him, if it be limited within its own lines—a God that makes my intellectual assent to his being an aggravation of my blasphemy if I rest there. This is a wondrous key : it is a key which says, "You must keep me, night and day, and never go anywhere without me, and you must only do that which is right, pure, true, honourable, and just." It is not a successful intellectual reply, that, that God is the key that fits the universe ; here is a moral God, a God that says, "You must do justly and love mercy—be true, upright, honourable, sincere, holy." There is no intellectual answer that I could not wriggle out of. Here is a moral enclosure that keeps me within a prison, from which I cannot escape argumentatively : an enclosure which becomes the widest liberty if I accept it sympathetically. Thus the intellectual satisfaction is magnified into moral service, and the command is, Thou shalt love the key, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. So that, you see, what was at

first an intellectual answer to an intellectual difficulty grows into a moral suggestion with a supreme claim upon everything that makes you a man. Completeness is the test of the highest logic.

Why, then, have we not seen God? Because you can never see anything that is really great. No man can see God and live. No man can see life; you can see its effects. Why, no man ever paints the sun. He does try his brush upon the meaner moon—he may paint sunlight—solar effects—but what man ever took acreage enough of canvas to paint that great white wheel the sun? No man hath seen God; no man hath seen himself! Life always comes in incarnations. It takes a garment within which it conceals itself, and from within which it performs its wonders. You kiss your child's cheek; you cannot kiss its soul. "I have," says one man, "gone up and down the earth with scientific weapons and instruments, and I cannot find God anywhere. In fact, I have taken the human body to pieces, and I cannot find the soul; therefore there is no soul." My reasoning would be, "You cannot find the soul, and therefore presumptively there is a soul to be found." So differently do we view the same things. Thus, if you cannot find the soul, no more can you find intelligence; therefore there is no intelligence. Beautiful logic; very rapid. True, I have taken a man to pieces, and I can find no soul in him. Very good; dissect Shakespeare from head to foot, and find the genius in him. You cannot; therefore there is no genius. A short and easy method with the poet. I will take this organ to pieces, great stops, little stops, all sorts of pipes and reeds and flutes, and I will fill the floor of this church with them, and say, "You call that a musical instrument; will you be kind enough to point out where the music is?" Take the bellows to pieces to find the air, take the man to pieces to find the soul, dissect the universe to find God. Your methods are wrong; your whole scheme of genius is out of joint.

Why have we not seen God? Let me ask you with what instruments could you have looked at him—what instruments have you equal to the inquiry and investigation? "We have eyes." Are you sure of that? "Quite sure of that." Is there anything in that drop of water trembling on that pin point? "Nothing in the world." I tell you there is a whole busy population in there. You say that is impossible. But you have eyes?

"Yes." Use them. "I do, and there is nothing in that drop of water." Now take this glass. Through the microscope you see all that large busy energetic population, and you lay down the glass, saying that you never could have thought it. Why have you not seen God? Have you seen the wind? No. There is no wind. You must admit that reasoning. You have not seen it; therefore there is none; reasoning is proof triumphant. You have not seen it. You are up early in the morning, and you are out all day; you live and work in the open air; you have not seen the wind; therefore there is none. Magnificent—as reasoning. There is a piece of iron; here is something in my hand towards which that piece of iron runs; you see the iron coming; see? I cannot see the magnetism between what is in my hand and the iron which is drawn, but it is the invisible that is doing it.

Having all these facts before me, it becomes easy for me to believe the words, No man hath seen God at any time; no man can see God and live. Why cannot I see God? I cannot see my own thought. Why cannot I see God? I cannot see a single motive that impels me. When, therefore, the preacher tells me that the invisible is the greatest, I say, I know that it is so down here in my own little life, at all events. Therefore it is not unlikely to be so in the higher liberties and spaces of the universe. You are travelling across the sea. What is there between you and the Atlantic Ocean? A plank an inch thick. Why don't you take a knife and cut that plank in two, and go into the sea? You could do it; physically yes, morally no. What keeps you back? The invisible. What do you mean by the invisible? Reason, reflection, sense of the value of life, consciousness of the responsibility—these things that have never been seen, that are altogether intangible and imponderable; these are the mighty forces that hold you back as an inviolable leash. Knowing these facts, when the Christian teacher says to me, "It is so on a larger scale; all things are under the Divine government of an invisible Being," I answer it is not unlikely to be so, seeing that within my own sphere of action the invisible is supreme.

I feel, therefore, in this introductory discourse—understand that it is merely introductory—that I am standing on the most solid ground when I occupy the position with which I began

namely, here is the universe, large, radiant, complete, harmonic, grand ; account for it. I have listened to all the various reasons which have been given. How far is the reason good ? I have not treated any one of the answers higher than that ; I have taken them simply in an intellectual way. No answer so completely covers the whole case, no answer leaves so little to be explained, no answer brings so profound and gracious a comfort to my mind and heart as the answer, "In the beginning, God." When a fuller answer comes I will accept it.

I have not seen God, but God was manifest in the flesh, just as my thought was. There is nothing mysterious in that. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us ; so was your motive. There is nothing crushingly and blindingly mysterious in the suggestion that the Word, Thought, the Logos, was made flesh. So must it be with every Logos, with every high thought, with every poet's dream. It must find a Bethlehem where it shall be born, and the stars must lead to it. No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son that is in the bosom of the Father, he hath revealed him. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed. We are obliged to do that in the lower ranks and lines of life. Oh that we might do it in the higher ranges and the nobler studies of the universe !

We have seen that there are two ways of proceeding about this great proposition that there is a God. The first and unsatisfactory one is to endeavour intellectually to prove it, which has never been done, and never can be done, so far as I see at present. The second method is to say, Here are certain things round about us—facts, realities—which we cannot deny, and about whose existence there is no dispute ; account for them. We have adopted the second method in this argument.

When the algebraist says, "Let x equal the unknown quantity," I could interrupt him, and say, "First prove the x ," but that would be a very foolish interruption. I allow him to use his x , and I await the solution which comes from his use of that symbolic letter. Well, I say, allow me to say, "Let God equal the unknown quantity," and you wait till I have carried that assumption through the whole universe so far as it is accessible to us. When I hand in my solution it will be time for you to examine and criticise it. Here is the universe—vast, radiant,

marvellous in combinations and processes. Here is my life, many-coloured, swift in movement, rapid in its combinations—tragical, comical, wondrous life. Account for these things. And the Christian teacher says he has endeavoured to account for them, and that no word so completely meets all the necessities of the case, so completely answers all difficulties, relieves all mysteries, as the word *God*. He says, "If I leave that word unspoken, I leave everything loose, incoherent, self-contradictory. If I pronounce that word with the reverence and love of the heart, I find a centre into which all things are gathered up, in which all things are fastened, out of which all things radiate with precision and utility and dignity. I find in God, personal, ever present, all-loving, the best solution of the things that are round about me, and all the things which constitute myself." Now we cannot allow him to escape with that answer only. We must go a little further into his conception of this term *God*. If it be a term only, then one term may be answered by another. We must take his term to pieces, and by a careful and just analysis, we may find what it comprehends and involves.

What do you mean when you say "God"? A thousand things. No two men mean the same thing when they say "God," and the mischief is that there should be persons who suppose that all men should mean exactly the same thing when they use the greatest terms that are in human speech. You mean the same thing when you say "clock," when you say "door," or "road," or "river." These are little terms, and they fall within simple and easy meanings. But when you say "child," what do you mean? "Man," what is the limit? "God" . . . ? You must not insist upon men caging the infinite, or laying bars of iron upon the immeasurable. There is a function which imagination alone can discharge—high, reverent, self-restrained, chastened but ever vigilant and urgent imagination. One man says, "When I think of God, I think of the sum total of being, the life fount out of which all living streams flow. He is not to be expressed or defined in words; he is spirit acting on spirit, the wondrous mighty All; he is to be thought about rather than spoken of. I worship him in silence; I look up, but do not speak; the mean words of man do but debase and vulgarise the infinite." His exhortation to me is, "Stand under that conception as thou dost

stand under the firmament, and take what is given thee of spiritual light and warmth and rain, and be dumb."

Now, this is a man in whose religion there is no detail ; he is religious in the gross. If you begin to make propositions to him, you insult his veneration. He would as soon think of parcelling out the firmament into private acres as of dividing and subdividing the infinite thought into small theological propositions. In support of such a view there is very much to be said. It ennobles and dignifies the mind ; it silences many vain and foolish speeches ; it kills the sectarianism which is built upon peculiar interpretations or audacious guesses ; it is religion in the gross, a grand silence, an eloquent speechlessness. It is a look that prays ; it is an attitude that worships. The Church wants none of book or man called priest or teacher. It stands outside of all these things, overwhelmed by the vastness of its own conception, trembling, speechless, before the wordless Infinite.

Another man says, "When I think of God, I think of him as a person, as a magnified man, an infinite extension of myself. I can lay hold of him in no other way. I could not join the thinking of that man whom you have just described. I must have a concrete, personal, individual God. When I think of such a God, I think of myself infinitised. I am a germ, he the full fruition. For example, if you ask me to define heaven, how can I do it but by glorifying the earth ? I cannot create a new universe ; I can but multiply that which is round about me. So if you ask me to define heaven, I will go to the garden on a summer day, when the flowers are most beauteous and fragrant ; I will say, Multiply that sight by infinitude, and you have paradise. I will go into a place where the music is most transporting and ravishing, where you have musical instruments of all sorts, touched by fingers of magic, by fingers of fire, and I will say, Listen ; multiply that by infinitude, and you have heaven. So when I think of God, I say, Find a man at his best, purest, and noblest estate ; find a man of the highest genius and the fullest inspiration ; invest him with all possible attributes of excellence. When you have done so, multiply him by infinity, and you begin to get my notion of God."

This is a simpler conception than the first ; yet it is warranted by the whole letter and spirit of Holy Scripture. It is warranted,

however, only as a convenience and help to the human understanding. It is a figurative representation of an otherwise incomprehensible fact. When God condescends to be called a person, it is an act of incarnation on his part, a miraculous conception, a new and daily humiliation of his majesty. The word *person* can never express the idea *God*. Yet it is a needful term, as indicating the very least that God can make himself. If the theologian contents himself by saying, "God is a person; turn over the page and go over to the next lesson," he is a fool. God is a person. He calls himself such that I may get hold of him; he tabernacles himself in this short word that I may speak to him. It is a word I would not give up; it is needful to my conception of the Divine nature. It signifies individuality as distinguished from immensity, a living and loving heart as distinguished from indifference and the sublimity of immovableness. It means *Father*. There the human heart rests.

But if you ask me what I personally mean by God, I mean neither of these two things alone. I mean more. I am a Christian teacher. As such I have a special revelation on which I rely. He is God beyond all knowledge, merciful and gracious, patient even unto longsuffering, watching us with an eye never closed in sleep, caring for us with all care, redeeming us with blood, training us for a grand and abiding hereafter. He is more than God, more than God and Father. He is to me the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So that, as a Christian thinker, I go to Christ for the interpretation of God, and for the uses which are to be made of that interpretation. I leave the realm of speculation, I come out of the cloud, I sit down beside Jesus, and say to him, "Show me the Father by showing me thyself. Let me lay my hand upon his heart by laying it upon thine."

Now, if I go to Jesus Christ for my interpretation, and the uses that are to be made of that interpretation, what shall I find? I shall find a Man who was constantly and essentially godly. The one thing which Jesus Christ wished to do in his life, in his youth, was his Father's business. When he last spoke, that night when the mortal terror seized his life, he wanted to do his Father's will. That is godliness. At twelve he says, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" At mid-

night he said, "Not my will, but thine be done." That is the way to prove God—to live in him, to be ruled by him, to breathe his spirit. Mark the infinite reasonableness of this. Given such a God as Jesus Christ revealed, he must be the supreme thought of the mind and the all-absorbing joy of the soul.

Religion thus judged is not a duty. No man can be religious as a mere obligation if he would be religious in the Christian sense. Religion must not be something *upon* a man; it must be something *in* a man, that shall become the man himself. Hard at first, becoming more easy and gladsome as the days roll on. His music must be this: "I delight to do thy will, O God. My delight is in the law of the Lord. I delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man. I will delight myself in thy commandments which I have loved." That is the spirit of religion. Do you go to church because it is your duty to go? Then I do not wonder at you being late, because a man hates duty. Do you go to church because it is your duty to go? Then I do not wonder at you longing to get out of it again, for duty is always hard if included within itself, without outlook, or fire, or poetry, or equal motive behind it. At first it may have somewhat of the nature of discipline in it. You are learning music; you touch your instrument, and the instrument speaks back as if it were insulted. Why? Because it did not know your fingers, and though your fingers did not mean to be at all rude to the great eloquent angel, yet they touched it roughly, and the sound was a sound of resentment. Put into English, it meant, "Hands off." Then, oh, the looking at the notes and at the keys, and at the keys and at the notes, and the twisting and the beginning again, and the going back, and the exclamations of self-disgust, and the determinations never to try again! Still you persevered, and one day you touched the instrument like a friend, and the instrument answered you like a friend. From that hour it was your delight, not your duty, to go and hold sweet long fellowship with that instrument.

You are learning a language; you say you would like to learn it without going through the grammar. I daresay you would: that is an old wish, and most human. But the strange alphabet, the everlasting declensions, the whole regiments and armies and

phalanxes of irregulars and exceptions—who can face them? You persevere, and some day you hear a speaker of that language address you, and you know what he said, and, oh, the boyish joy, oh, the childlike gladness! You run to your best friend and say, “He spoke to me in German, and I quite understood him.” From that moment your German was a delight to you—if ever such a language can be a delight to any mortal intellect. But it is first hard, and then easier, and then gladsome. So with this church-going and Bible-reading and religious service; it is at first somewhat perhaps of the nature of duty and obligation—you feel that you are in an imperative mood and cannot well escape from it, and so you have to conjugate backwards until you get into the lighter and more genial moods—but at last it is a delight, and the word *commandment* itself but too sweetly indicates the gladness and the rapture with which you render religious service.

If I study God under the direction of Jesus Christ, and following his example, I shall be quite childlike in my spirit in relation to the Father. Jesus Christ was a Son in the Father’s house. Beloved, what manner of love hath the Father bestowed on us that we should be called the sons of God! I want to be led into this higher music, namely, my Father’s business, my Father’s way, my Father’s house, my Father’s pleasure. When I can say so,

“I’ll bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.”

When God is only an intellectual conception to me, my life is an intellectual weariness, my toil a manual drudgery, but when he says, “I am thy Father, and thou art my child,” and I seize the notion, then all the days of the week are absorbed in a bright calm Sabbath that comes like a sanctuary and a defence around my soul.

But my unbelief will not let me seize all this enjoyment of God. My unbelief will not let God be Father; my unbelief says to me—for unbelief is an awful theologian—“Look here”—and I look at its grim, hard face—“God will be a kind of Father to you by-and-by if you will do certain things, which it is impossible for you to do.” Poor gospel, mean gospel! Faith says, “See here; God is your Father; whatever you may be, he changeth

not. Mean, miserable, sinful head, heart, hand, foot, soiled through and through, God is still your Father, and he is longing for you to come home again. He is grieved by your sin; as a Father he will pardon your guilt, as a Father he will watch over your going out and your coming in; as a Father he undertakes your redemption—look to him and live.” That is a grander speech; I know speeches that are true; we all do that. When unbelief says to me, “God will be your Father under such and such conditions, which it is impossible for you to fulfil,” I know that unbelief is telling me a lie; the voice is false, the tone is undivine. When faith says to me, “Child, thy Father calls thee,” something within me answers like an echo to a voice, and I know the Gospel to be true.

Then what is it that hinders me fully and entirely enjoying all this revelation of God and resting upon him wholly? If I have to be frank with you, the answer will be a mournful one. I could gild it; I will not. The reason I do not fully, with absoluteness of realisation, enjoy this revelation of God in Christ is, after it there comes a demand which I find it painful to fulfil; I first of all have to go to a Sinai: the ten commandments are handed to me written in stone. I walk on; precepts and statutes are written upon the rock and upon the tree: are being uttered in the wind and trumpeted in the thunder. Religion, as revealed by Christ, is not a pleasant dream or an intellectual luxury; it is the supreme command, it is the absolute claim of God. If I have to be religious in Jesus Christ's sense, accepting his definition of God, I shall have no time for myself, I shall have no money of my own, I shall have no friends of my own picking, I shall have no feast that he will not claim to be at, I dare touch no wine that he does not first drink—I dare not even go into a wilderness without taking his lamp with me—and these things the incomplete, shattered human will hates. Selfishness says, “Give me a little of my own, I do not care how little, only let it be mine. Give me half a day in the month, give me ten shillings a week, let me go into this door and into that—only do, and I ask no more.” But Jesus Christ says, “No—not a moment, not a penny, not an entrance, not a single thought thine own.” And yet he says his yoke is easy and his burden is light. So it is, like the music and the language I have now spoken about. Rightly

taken to, the preliminaries rightly undergone, in the grace and strength of Heaven, the outcome will indeed be blessed.

So I return to my starting point, and say I have two courses open to me about this matter. I can have a god of my own imagining ; I can go to my fancy for a god, or I can accept the God that is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. You go to your fancy for a god ; let me ask you a plain question : Is your fancy a very likely quarter in which to find a very adequate divinity ? You mock the poor idolater who makes a god out of a tree ; I want you to see you are doing exactly the same thing, minus the tree. Nay, the idolater has a god of his fancy ; he says, " I must make this into something visible " : you have a god in your fancy, and you dare not make him visible ; you cannot, no manger would cradle him, no Magi from the far East would trim their lamps and bind their sandals and handle their staves to find him. It takes the true God to come down into flesh ; no other dare venture on the meanness. Besides, if you made your god, you could unmake him.

I conclude, therefore, by saying—finishing thus the first part of my discourse—that, given the universe, given human life, given the whole scheme of things as now known to us, to account for them, no other solution so fully satisfies my intelligence and my heart as the solution—God. Given the solution, God, no interpretation of that term, pantheistic as including the great sum total, deistic as including a general but not special providence, can satisfy my heart. I find the only interpretation of God I can rely upon and rest in is the interpretation given by Jesus Christ. With that I will fight my fight in time ; with that I will face the great unknown.

We have agreed, for the purposes of this argument, not to endeavour to prove intellectually the existence of God. We have, indeed, gone so far as to say that that is impossible. The finite cannot prove the infinite ; it would, indeed, be a self-stultification of terms. The infinite must reveal itself to the finite ; the finite can never either find out or prove it. What then ? Our course was to take the facts as we find them, and having massed those facts before us, to put this inquiry concerning the whole of them : How are these facts to be accounted for ? We say nothing about

God at the beginning. We do not dogmatically and authoritatively say, "There is a God, and you must believe it." We are content for the purposes of this study to leave God out of the question altogether at the beginning, and to go with men of science wherever they may take us, and when we have completed their circle, to ask the question I have just put, namely, How are all these most wonderful things to be accounted for?

Let us look at human society. Having acquainted ourselves somewhat with its constitution, with what I may call the very mystery of its being, let us continue to urge the inquiry, How is it to be explained or accounted for? You have upon the face of the earth what is called human society, an organic sum total, which time does not destroy, which contention, antagonism, and strife of the fiercest kind only helps to expand and to consolidate. Time uses his scythe, Death goes forth to his black harvest, the whole earth seems to be ripped and scarred with tombs, and yet on the green earth there is a greater society to-day than there ever was. How is it to be accounted for? By its order, by its sympathy, by its brotherly love, by its spiritual graces? You do not ask me to answer that ridiculous interrogation. No two men are exactly alike, no two interests are precisely identical; everywhere the thing that strikes you is difference, contrast, incompatibility, and yet you can no more hinder the progress of this society, or reduce it to nothingness, than you can impede a planet or dissolve a star. This society is a continual mystery. It is a batch, a chaos, of inconsistencies. You say it must kill itself, yet it lives on, more prosperous and influential year by year. Might has sometimes had right so utterly in its power that you have said right can never survive. Yet right has thriven in adversity, and clothed itself with new beauty in the fire. Human society seems always to have had a razor at its throat, but never yet has it taken its own life. Account for it. Society is marked by contrasts that appear to be in themselves full of peril, and fraught with danger that can neither be mitigated nor avoided. What think ye? Society is divided into master and servant. What society, looked at philosophically, could live under such a division as that only? Why do you not bridge over the difference? Why do you not make all men equal? Why do you not lift up that which is far down, that all may become on

a level, one having no higher and better rights than another? You meet in congress; you print programmes; you have discussions. Why do you not level up and make all equal? Society is divided into learned and ignorant. Why does not the ignorant man read books and make himself learned? You have refined and vulgar. Why does not the vulgar man go to school and put on refinement, if he cannot put it *in*? These are questions that you can dismiss with an easy, airy lightness if you like, but if you do so, you abandon the scientific spirit, and you have no right any longer to claim a status amongst the most ardent and interrogative intelligence of the day.

Then look at the moral distinctions you have in society. You have every variety of temper, purpose, desire, sensibility, and service. You have the brave man whose face is a battle; you have the coward that skulks out of the light, the generous and the mean, the unsuspecting and the distrustful, the earnest soul that prays for the race like an intercessor, and the villain whose life never heightened and softened into a prayer for any human soul. Account for these things. On yonder hillside you have such a lot of dear, bright, romping little children; they never could be sad; that is the sun of the world. Arguing from what I see on that stirring side of the hill, I should say the world is heaven. On the other side of the hill you have the old man sighing for home, the bad man ending a wild day in a wilder night; you have the blind, who only know of morning by hearsay, the dumb, the imbecile; and on and on the exciting panorama stretches and palpitates until the eye is dim with watching. Account for these things—for progress amid collision, for rest amid strife, for solidity amid earthquake and whirlwind. Tell me how it is that society, drunk, mad, with a razor at its throat, cannot commit suicide.

Now I hold that this is as much matter of purely scientific interest as the formation of rocks or the distribution of plants. One student says, "I am an inquirer into physical manhood." I reply, "I am a student of social manhood." We are both scientific inquirers. I cannot allow that the man who has a small sharp knife in his hand for the purpose of cutting human sinews is a scientific student, at the expense of the man who is studying social humanity and asking how it coheres, increases, and advances. This, however, in passing.

Now look at your own individual life, and thus bring the mystery nearer home. You have no control over your birth. In the name and fear of God, I say that if I had been asked if I would have been born into this world, I should have said No. I am not here of my own will, yet I dare not go out. Born a little infant, of whom the priest says, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," I may go out into hell. I did not ask to come in ; I dare not pray to go out, except with reserves and calculations that diminish the prayer into a skulking request. You work, you learn, you suffer ; you fight and lose the battle, you run and lose the race ; you are just going to drink the cup of joy, and an invisible hand dashes it out of your grasp. The child that is to be your mainstay and comfort, that is to draw down the lids of your eyes at last, and say, "God bless you !" even after you have just gone, dies first. The man who never prays beats you hollow at every game you play. You touch the rock, and it melts into water ; another man with foot that never trod the altar stair touches the water, and it hardens into rock again, and he builds his castle upon its stony base. How is it ? Is he a scientific man who comes with his brows bound with botanical specimens, and he not a scientific man who comes up from society asking urgently with tears in his voice, with much doubt in his tone, and great sad wonder, "How is it ? can it be explained ? what is the *rationale* of this marvellous incoherent cohesion, this self-contradictory society " ?

Then see your power and your weakness. You cannot do the things you want to do. From finger tip to finger tip you are under seven feet in length. If I offered you the sun in the heavens to put out your fingers a sixteenth of an inch further, you could not. You are full of yesterday ; you are no wiser than a dog about to-morrow. We say, "When the historian comes, how will he view such and such circumstances ?"—that is, a man who is clever in turning over dusty pages, and making out small print, and getting together forgotten things. I say, "When is the prophet coming who can read to-morrow ?" and the dreary answer, more an echo than a voice, is, "Never."

How do we account for these things ? Suppose we say it is chance. Magnificent answer—satisfying every fool to satiety—chance ! I ask if that would satisfy any intelligent man amongst

you. The man who can believe that all I have now described, and all which is related thereto, is the work of chance, has a greater capacity of belief than any heathen that ever swallowed ten thousand gods. Look how the suggestion of chance degrades us. Have we not power to protect ourselves against chance? We protect ourselves against infection; why do we not get up a limited liability company for the protection of one another against this mad dog, chance? We are clever; why not apply our ingenuity in this direction? What is the good of your building bridges, and laying telegraphs, and lighting electric flames, and doing all manner of wonderful things, if you cannot conquer chance and chain him to a kennel? Are you going to sit down under the plague of chance? Why do we not assemble in solemn congress, and get the upper hand of a power that makes everything else so uncertain? Let us, however, renounce the name of chance as rather short, and, on the whole, somewhat silly, and let us give it a nobler name, and call all that we have now seen "the operation of the law of averages." I am sure that must console every breaking heart. At once you will feel that we have hit upon the profoundest solution of the mysteries that becloud and embarrass and agonise this frail human life. But if Presbyter is Priest writ large, the law of average is chance turned into a polysyllable, and nothing more. How are we to account for these things?

Suppose a man should say, "Let us not account for them." Then I should charge him with being wanting in the scientific spirit, which says, "We want to know; we want to find out; we must be true to the line of our inquiry."

Upon this matter you go to what is called Church, and addressing the man who stands up in the pulpit, you say to him, "Sir, how do you account for what is called Society, with all its tragedy and comedy, its strife, contention, loss, pain, joy, risk, madness, and yet wondrousness of genius and power? How do you account for the child dying, for the good man suffering, and for the knave prospering? What have you to say about blood problems like these? I am tired of hearing trifles discussed." I answer, "In the beginning, God. These things are not what they seem; you have not seen all; above all, under all, around all, there is a mysterious, benign, judicial, gracious Providence. The

time of full solution is not yet ; we are in the thick of dust and smoke ; a great fight is going on ; the meaning will be read out to you by-and-by." What is his answer to me ? He says, " Without calling upon you for any merely intellectual defence of that suggestion, I feel that it ought to be, that it must be, true." I cannot, however, rest with that concession ; in the meantime it is excellent ; it gives me a standing ground with the man, but nothing more. Observe how this method of reasoning operates. If you start from the point—there is a God ; go and find him—then all the mysteries of society will be so many objections to the theory. If you commence at the other end—see, here is society ; account for it—then you are not lost amid all the details of the case, but you catch its spiritual genius, its moral afflatus and spirit, and lifting yourself above all that is of the nature of mere detail, you say, with a reverent spirit, " How is it ? " The answer is, " God."

But if we give the answer : " God," the difficulties appear to remain. Children die ; good men suffer ; bad men prosper ; the scroll in the hand of weary pensive Time is still written all over with mourning, lamentation, and woe. How are we to reconcile such facts with the doctrine of an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-gracious Providence ? I will give you the answer. How does the Bible, regarding it as simply a book without a name, treat such inquiries, or regard such differences ? First, it recognises them, and by so much it commits itself to some explanation. The Bible does not slur over the difficulties of human life : no book is so explicit and minute and emphatic in its delineation of human life, human suffering, and human discipline. Sometimes when I open my Bible it seems to be nothing but one long, heavy groan over human sin and human woe. So we have to deal with a book that comes down amongst us and says, " Yes, the difficulties you speak about are real ; they are not to be ignored, and no trifling answer will cover them." So far, so good.

In the next place, the Bible traces these evils to their cause. It may be wrong, or it may be right, but it does not blink the question, " What is the reason ? " It says, " This is the reason : sin is the explanation of moral crookedness on the part of man. The breach of faith, the suicide of integrity, the rebellious off-taking of the robe of innocence and taking on the nakedness of

shame—this is the explanation.” I claim nothing for the answer, further than it does attempt to go to the root of the matter, and give a cause for what occasions us so much just and bewildering perplexity.

In the next place, the Bible points out the highest uses of many of the sufferings which afflict human society. The Bible does not give them up in despair: the Bible does not limit those sufferings within the area of their immediate operation. The Bible says to me, “The wound is very deep, but it may be healed; the suffering is very keen, but it is for thy chastening and purification. The disappointment is very bitter, but there is a deep and gracious meaning in it, and behind it; wait for the explanation. Accept these perplexities in a reproachful, pining spirit, and they will aggravate themselves and become tenfold more difficult of endurance; receive them in the right spirit, saying, ‘God reigns; God loves me; God means good by me: he makes stars in the darkness; he intends all these things to bring out of my life wine that has not yet been crushed out of the grapes of my heart’—speak so, and what now afflicts thee may become a root of joy and a spring of pleasure.” I take that answer: I say there is in it sympathy; there is no attempt to evade the difficulty, there is no effort made to mitigate my own apprehension of the magnitude and terribleness of these sufferings: they are all recognised; their case is stated, their possible highest uses are indicated.

And then the Bible not only recognises these evils, traces their cause, and indicates some of their uses; it predicts their consummation and their extinction. It is not afraid of them. The Bible says, “Sorrow may endure for a night; joy cometh in the morning.” The Bible says, “All these things are but for a moment, if you bring to bear upon them the power of an endless life. Your light affliction is but for a moment, if you look at things not seen.” “Jesus Christ came into the world,” says the Bible, “to put an end to these things, and to reconcile all things unto himself, and he will do it.” There is no break in the emphasis; there is no halting in the Biblical prophecy; it goes straight through like a king, like a God. When I compare these answers with the suggestion of chance and the law of averages, I feel that the true science is in the Biblical reply, and not in the false conjecture. Here, then, I rest, till some better solution be

given me. I quiet myself in God. "Not my will, but thine be done." The details vex me; the great universal and unchangeable principle consoles and sustains me.

Crossing the great deep at night, lying sleeplessly and perhaps painfully in your berth, longing for the light, without much hope that it will bring you comfort, what hear you? The surge of the water, the moan of the wind, and the tinkle of a bell. That bell has no sooner told its little tale of time than a voice in a sing-song tone says, "All's well, all's well." It is the man on the look-out. You say, "How can all be well when I am not sleeping? how can all be well when I am sick and in pain? how can all be well when I am not at home and the children are longing for me?" There is a higher law than your sleeplessness, your pain, and your child's desire for your presence. Within those limits you are right; all is not well; but in the higher sphere that takes in a larger area and commands a wider outlook, all's well, all's well. So it is with this marvellous mystery, this strange Providence. "I am sick, and tired, and heart-broken, misunderstood, and belied, and slandered, and ill-fed, and battered down," saith the Christian man, but the angel on the look-out says, "All's well, all's well." The vessel has her face straight home, and the sea is yielding to give her passage-way. "All's well, all's well." And at last, at home,

"Above the rest this note shall swell,
My Jesus hath done all things well."

When I compare this reply with chance and law of averages, I feel that the Bible has got the scientific answer, the grand philosophy. So my song shall be:—

"O Lord, how happy should I be
If I could cast my care on thee,
If I from self could rest,
And feel at heart that One above
In perfect wisdom, perfect love,
Is working for the best!"

Men, brethren, and fathers, this is the answer of the Bible. I wait for a more magnificent reply.

I have finally to apply the argument to the book which is

called the Book of God. I shall report first upon the Old Testament; I am to do it simply as a literary surveyor, not as a theologian, not as a sceptic. I assume that you have appointed me to prove the book; to look over it for you, and to tell you what is in it, and to give you a general notion of its genius and scheme. You will understand, therefore, that I am now about to act the part of a literary surveyor, whose business it will be to draw you a general outline of the book, and to tell you something about its principal contents. Having got the plan fully on the table before us, I shall repeat the question which constitutes the staple of this whole argument, namely, How is such a book to be accounted for?

I may just mention to you, in the first instance, that as a literary surveyor, I have thought it to be my duty to read the book. I am certain that many persons on hearing that will be secretly surprised, for nowadays there is a keen and all but infinite intuition which knows a book without reading it. Not having attained to that high grace, I am obliged to begin at the beginning, and read my book straight through, like a drudge. I have done that for you. You will be surprised how very few people have ever done so. If you press them upon the point, they will say that no doubt they must have done so when they were at school. Others will say that there can be no doubt that, as children, they may have gone through, at all events, the principal part of the book; so you have halting and crippled talk of that kind. Where is the man who can say—as every man is bound to say, who is going to give anything like a complete and responsible opinion—“I have read the book straight on, from ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,’ to the benediction in the book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine”? The man who has done so has a right to have some opinion about the volume. Having myself, therefore, as your literary surveyor, just gone over the whole field, from the very beginning to the very end, I am here to report to you something about the book, and having handed in my report, I shall not be content for you to pigeon-hole it, and to say you will look at it by-and-by when you have a more convenient season. I shall ask you to remunerate me for my toil by giving an opinion, a decision, promptly; and the question I shall urge upon you with importunity and vehemence

will be, "How can you account for such a book as the Bible?" Now let us go to work.

First of all, I am struck with what we should call the utter want of scientific or artistic arrangement in the putting together of the book. Nobody seems to have cared much how it was put together. It has not been edited, it has been huddled; there is no trace of a literary plan; no editor or architect could have been employed in putting together the various parts. Man after man appears to have written just what he pleased, and the parts seem to have been thrown together anyhow. I dare not put out a book so badly arranged, but here it is, with all its imperfections on its head. There is no preface; there is no index; there is no table of contents. Here and there—in fact, all over the face of the book—strange hands have scribbled something by which they have meant to indicate the contents of the book, but the men themselves have written, as it appears to me, when they pleased, how they pleased, as much as they pleased, and have allowed other people to add little bits here and there, and the book has come together in the night time, when nobody could tell exactly how it was, to tumble into such rough coherence as it may claim. There is not the slightest attempt to secure beauty or uniformity of outline. Things that belong to one another are not put together. Some are here, some there, and some elsewhere, and a good many are half put: are suggested rather than stated. There is a great deal of cloud and mystery and incompleteness. I was not surprised at this, because I had, just before reading the book, been spending a few years in endeavouring to put together another book, called *Nature*, and I was quite struck with the resemblance between the book written and the book unwritten. When I went out to the fields of nature, I said, "Now, all the ferns will grow together, all the oaks will be set in a row, all the birds will be distributed, will be caged in with little golden clouds they cannot escape, and all things will be done in order." Just the contrary. I seemed to find the ferns anyhow. As I got farther and farther into the secret, I began to see that under the disorder there was an order, subtle and complete. When I went from Kew Gardens into the great forest of nature, I said, God made Kew, and some blundering fools have made the forest. I said, Kew does credit to God. so nicely trimmed, so

carefully swept, so critically labelled. Ah, said I, this is worthy of a God ; but the tangled forests, the solitary places, the growth unregistered, untrimmed, unscheduled, growing without tabulation—what could I say but that some wild beast of a man had been there, making order disorder, and turning scheme and plan and cosmos into chaos and darkness ?

When I went to the Zoological Gardens, I said, Now you see this is worthy of a God : all nicely caged in, all the places ticketed ; a man knows here where he is, but as to nature—a jungle and forest and wilderness and rock and crag and ravine and deep river and tortuous way. But I saw that the book unwritten and the book written were marvellously alike in this ; there was a kind of fearless genius, of dauntless spirit, that rose up out of the chaos, and said, “ Mend me, if you can,” and I was, therefore, as a literary surveyor, touched into a momentary glow by what I thought was the independent fearlessness and fierceness of a disorder that set itself up to rank with sun and star and milky way. I found the Botanical Gardens were made by man at so much a day, the Zoological Gardens the same. I found that any extent of botanical and zoological arrangement could be effected for so much a day. There is no science in nature, there is no theology in the Bible ; but as nature supplies all the material upon which science operates, so the Bible supplies all the material which theology puts together, often with the hands of a clumsy artisan, and nearly always with the beggarly spirit of a bigot.

The next thing that struck me in reading your book was that it makes no pretence whatever to be restrained by what is called taste or delicacy. There are many things in it that cannot be read aloud, thank God. There are some things which little children are not permitted to read. Ah me ! how foolishly we treat those who are of the kingdom of heaven ! The book moves calmly and without shame right on, amid the miscellaneousness of our life. It looks like fire ; who can corrupt fire ? It has a spirit of absolute and incorruptible purity. The Bible makes no apology, draws no curtain, makes no excuse, never turns aside to stammer or to blush ; on it goes : taking life as it is, and describing it without flattery or fear. It strikes me as very like what I have seen in the other book, unwritten. The Bible is

true to the very root and reality of things. The book does not ignore facts with a goody-goody blindness, but faces them, names them, proposes remedies for them, and searches into the root and core of the whole of them. No man in this country dare publish certain separate chapters of the Bible, and show them in his window. How then? They are right in their setting. Pick them out with a foul spirit, and they are foul; let them alone in the order and rhythm which God has appointed, and we cannot do without them. Evil be to him that evil thinks. These things belong to a greater whole; they must not be detached; the part that would be intolerable is essential to the whole that is beautiful.

The third thing that I have to report to you, as your literary surveyor, is that this book was written by some thirty or forty people, who, generally speaking, never saw one another, and who were probably unaware, speaking generally, that other people were writing parts of the book. Some of them lived a thousand years and more apart. Hardly any of them had what we should now call schooling or education; some had very much, some had none. There was one grand old man—I like his pen, shaggy and strong; it makes a crashing noise as it writes—who was very highly learned, and another was a rough-handed, horny-fleshed man, who kept a secretary, whom he never paid, to put down such blundering remarks as occurred to his fisherman's lips. One was very great, clothed with clouds, crowned with starlights, and another was an unlearned and ignorant man, and they have put their contributions to this book all within the same covers. There they are to-day, and the literary beauties of the Bible have been praised by men of letters. Many of the compositions are bold, grand, elevating, thrilling; some of them have never been excelled in simple pathos and in profound sympathy. I report this as a fact.

Add to these considerations the further fact that this book never shirks any great question. It does not content itself with trifles; it is not a book that offers little mincing guesses to little riddles—it gives an answer, whether right or wrong I do not now say, but, as a matter of fact, it does give an answer to the highest questions that can engage the human mind. By so much it commits itself—by so much it comes into open court in the

broad daytime, and says, "Cross-examine me"—by so much it gives a cross-examiner an immense advantage over it; its utterances, and confessions, and statements are so broad and unreserved, he would be an unskilled cross-examiner who could not torture a witness so frank and open-mouthed. In the very forefront it has a God; its very first sentence is illuminated and sanctified by an awful name. The Bible does not grope after God in reverent or audacious speculation—it declares him, reveals him, asserts him. The Bible does not say, "Now, let it be granted, merely for the sake of argument, that there is a God"; but boldly it begins, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." It next addresses itself to man, and enlarges upon his career and destiny. The Bible accounts for him; the Bible says, "I will tell you when you were made, and how, and all about you." The Bible says, "I will account for the tumult and disorder, and incoherence and ruin: I know the mournful secret." For these things it gives no superficial name; it speaks a new word. It gives to dumb unconsciousness a speech which that unconsciousness claims as most expressive. The Bible says, "Sirs, all these tragedies, tumults, tempests, agonies, ruins, griefs, deaths, all come out of *sin*." The answer may be right, the answer may be wrong—I am only telling you that the Bible does not shirk the question. It has a short, sharp, piercing answer: it does not hide itself in a high cloud, where you cannot get at it; it comes flap down on the plain dust and says, with face of fire and tongue of passion, "This is *sin*." By so much it puts itself into my power. It does not address me from an altitude I cannot attain; it puts its feet, so to speak, in my own footprints, and tells me the cause of my distress and bitterness of soul.

The Bible does not content itself with drawing a line around one world or one day. It takes in the future; it has a great horizon; its straight lines do form an angle, Euclid notwithstanding. Ay, marvellous is that. The old geometrician tells me that straight lines do not form an angle, and he is right within his little limits. But if I look at two straight lines, say two rows of trees, or two rows of houses, if they be long enough, they seem to get together, or there would be no poetry in the world. It is that forming the far-off perspective, that mingling of

things so far separate, that gives the world its genius and its literature. So the Bible looks down the common rows and lines of things, and brings in the future, a haze, a mist, a golden cloud, a strange mingling of things, out of which shall come what it calls heaven.

The Bible is not a book that can only tell you what is the matter with you. Any doctor can do that. The Bible is a hopeful book; its music seems to come out of Almightyness, and to fill all space with its enraptured strains. It foretells the levelling of the high hills and the lifting up of the valleys, the outstraightening of the crooked lines. The Bible is most jubilant in tone. With a trumpet of thunder it tells that the King is coming. Nor is this animation to be accounted for by high spirits that are momentary and transient. The Bible deals with the saddest facts in human life first, and out of its treatment of these facts comes the shouting of infinite joy. The Bible deals with the most ghastly and tragic human fact of sin. Never does it say "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. Its policy is not "Forgive and forget and say nothing more about it." Never does it make light of iniquity. It says, "Stand, till I dig a hell for it, and fill it with unquenchable fire."

The Bible does not say, "If there has been sin in the world, punish it." Any gaoler can punish a thief; how to redeem him, cure him, make him honest, that is the problem the Bible undertakes to solve. The magistrate arms himself with little rods and instruments of torture and punishment, and he says, "Hand over the thieves and rascals to me, and I will see what can be done with them." Nothing. Punishment is failure; punishment is vile surgery. What does God do? This book says—I am simply reporting upon it—"I show unto you a more excellent way." Punishment we must have for social uses, but punishment is never regenerative. Punishment does not remake or re-create or restore the soul. You must have atonement. How? By blood. Whose blood? The blood of the innocent. The injurer can never die sacrificially, expiatorily—he can only die like a condemned dog. Who is to suffer, then, that forgiveness may be possible? The innocent, the injured. The future of the afflicted land will have to be redeemed through the suffering of the sons of God, through the night sweats

of blood the light may not look upon, but there will come that sweet, great spirit of love afterwards that will say, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." You will never say it out of your own intelligence; you will never say it out of your consciousness; you will never say it out of your selfishness; you can only say it when the nails run into you and the blood gushes from your smitten side. If thou hast not been among those agonies, thou art a poor fool and not fit to read words that have any sense in them.

The Bible does not come to me and say, "You are a sinner," only; it says, "You are a sinner, and I can save you. Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." You can vulgarise these answers, or you can make them sublime. They are the answers of this book. The Bible is not afraid to say that God died. No other book ever parted with its god in death. The Bible is not afraid to say that sin is the supreme difficulty of God, a difficulty not to be met by the miracle of power, but to be counteracted by the greater miracle of sacrifice.

I have to report that your book reveals God in a very singular manner. It does not shut up God in eternity; it makes him a man, it gives him a human name, it finds a cradle for him in Bethlehem and an altar on Calvary; it represents him as hungering, thirsting, sleeping, rejoicing, weeping. Does it bring him into contempt? No further than you can bring fire into contempt. Fire will be treated most familiarly up to a given point, but beyond that—hands off! That is how it is with God. Fire loosed from the sun will come into your kitchen and cook your food, in the friendliest way; fire will go upstairs into the nursery and keep the little children warm all day and not refuse to burn all night. When there is sickness in the house, fire says, "Take me into the sick-chamber; I will make pictures for the ailing one; I will throw shadows on the wall; I will warm the air"—it will be friendly with all possible generosity and grace. Now make free with it, trifle with it; down goes your house. Say, "Thou dost come into my kitchen and nursery and sick-chamber; now let us be friends, and let us take away all

restrictions and limitations," and one hot cinder brings your castle to the ground. No trifling. Friendliness? Yes. Trifling? No. So my great God Christ. Who so gentle? who so humble? who so meek in heart? No house too mean for him to enter, no food too coarse for him to bless, no sin too vile for him to pardon; yet does he answer rulers with silence, and astound death by resurrection.

I have to report that this book never flatters or courts any reader,—does not wish to make itself popular. It announces its laws and urges its claims most inexorably—compromise and concession it will never make; with authority and emphasis it never ceases to speak. Other books ask to be read, plead for opportunity, beg to be heard; I have passed thousands of them through my hands as a literary surveyor, and they all begin, in effect, "Courteous reader, will you be so indulgent as to pay attention to me? Will you oblige me by reading half-a-dozen pages?" This book never. It tells every man that he is a sinner: to every man it preaches the humiliating doctrine of self-helplessness. At first it makes enemies. It sends a sword in the earth; it kindles a fire in families. When the proud man comes to it, it says, "Hands off; you are bad." When the rich man says, "Let me look at you," it says, "Woe unto ye that trust in riches." When the self-righteous man comes with long lean fingers, and touches it with cold marrow, it says, "O ye generation of vipers!" It takes the wise in their own craftiness, and the answers of great men it returns as the replies of fools. Yet it leaves no class of human experience unprovided for. It has a gospel for the penitent and a promise for the hopeless, a blessing for little children, a solace for hearts broken with grief. It has texts which the poorest memory can recollect; it has "jewels five words long that sparkle on the forefinger of all time." It has arguments to arrest the most powerful mind, promises which must be whispered, psalms in which the thunder might take part, judgments which strike us dumb with fear.

Now, sirs that is my report. I will next treat of the New Testament, for you especially, but my report is so far complete. Now account for the book. If any of you should say to me, having heard these things, "Truly this is the book of him who made the heaven and the earth," I should say, "Amen." If

any of you should say, "A book that inspires must itself be inspired," I should say, "The argument is unanswerable."

I now propose to give you an idea of the structure and bearing of the New Testament, and then to ask you, How do you account for such a book written under such circumstances?

Now, there was a Man in history—nobody doubts his reality as a historical personage—called Jesus Christ, who lived a certain life, who had round about him a certain number of disciples, part of whom undertook to give to the world a biographical and spiritual description of their Master. How would that life be written? I should say, first of all, the oldest disciple will write the first part of it, and that would be natural. In fact, I do not see how there can be any escape from an appointment of that sort. The senior disciple, the first man called by his Lord, will, of course, know more about him than anybody else could possibly know, and, therefore, he will write the first portion of the life. Then there were two other men with whom Christ was very familiar; their names were James and John. James will follow the first disciple, as a matter of course; then John will conclude the whole testimony; and thus we shall have the three favourites in actual life, also the three favourites in literary appointments, and the biography of Christ will be threefold, and its authorship will be by Peter, James, and John. So you think? You are wrong, wholly. The first disciple is not permitted to write a word of the life of his Master, nor is the second whom you have named, James; and the third undertakes to do a work which I will presently describe. Matthew and John were of the first twelve; Mark and Luke were not. So we are to have two lives written from the inside and two lives written from the outside. Where there is such an openness, where such a challenge to variety of gift, recollection, power, genius, I want you to see that there must also have been a certain indestructible consciousness of the truth and reality of the things that were about to be narrated. If all the disciples had been of the first twelve, we might have said there is something like a literary conspiracy there; but two of them are of the twelve, and two are not of the twelve; two of them write from a more or less interior view, and the other two from a more or less external view.

Now look at the characteristics. The first man is called Matthew. He was a man of business ; he was a commercial man ; he was a tax-gatherer, a publican ; he had to do with figures, with marking down accounts, with taking a statement of this man and of that man, embracing many particulars. He was a kind of commercial literary character. Now when he comes to write a book, is he faithful to these characteristics, or is he so completely changed that he himself actually would not know his own individuality ? He is precisely in literature what he was in business—a man of action. In Matthew's Gospel you have action following action right swiftly, and also you have in Matthew the longest reports of the discourses which Jesus Christ delivered. He was a man of action, and he was a man also used to the pen. He took down statements and objections and all kinds of different things which he heard in the prosecution of his business, and he is precisely and minutely faithful to those characteristics when he comes to contribute his share to the literature of the Master whom he served.

Now Mark was a different kind of man. There was not so much activity in his disposition and life. He was a quiet, observant man, nearly always in the background. When he came to the front, he very soon regretted having done so, and fell back again into the shadows. He was one of a large number of persons—not active, enterprising, valorous, hardly ever seen at the front, and yet necessary to the completeness of the construction of human society. What do we find in Mark's Gospel, then ? Exactly what we should expect to find from such a man. There is no other Gospel that exhibits so clear and complete a power of observation as Mark's Gospel exhibits. Hence I find in Mark an account of Christ's gestures, how he stood, especially of Christ's looks—those silent, all-meaning looks. Mark seems to have kept his eye upon the eyes of his Lord. It is in Mark I read how he looked, how he observed, how he stood, how he sighed—precisely the characteristics you would have expected from all that is known of Mark's general disposition and turn of mind. He is not a monstrosity in literature ; he is alike when he stands back in the shadow and when he represents his picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet who can tell how much Mark was indebted to another ? Who was that other ?

That other was the first disciple. Mark was the secretary of Peter. Mark wrote very much at Peter's dictation, and who could have told Mark so much about the looks of Christ as Peter could tell him? The supreme look of Christ was directed to Peter; that look broke Peter's heart; and who could tell how quietly and pathetically, with great tears in his eyes and great sobs in his voice, Peter directed Mark's attention to those wonderful and revealing looks of the all-seeing eyes of the Lord, and especially of that last look which went to Peter's heart and broke it? How strange a retribution, how singular that the first disciple should be ordered back, and that the first disciple's *interpretes*, or secretary, or clerk, should be sent forth to the very front! How like what we do know in Providence ourselves! Who can tell whether this book was not also written by the hand that is writing the literature of our daily life—so strange, so mixed, so tragical, so startling, so unlike everything that we ourselves ever have written, or could write? I suggest the thought; I do not give an authoritative reply.

Luke was a physician, a man who had been long years at school, a literary man, accustomed to observe closely, to ask critical questions, and to listen for the answers. Do we find anything in his Gospel to correspond with that kind of training? Exactly what corresponds to it, nothing more and nothing less. Hence, in Luke, you have so long accounts of the diseases which our Lord cured; you have a completeness which you might have expected from a scholarly and literary man. Luke, in fact, begins his Gospel by saying that, as many persons had undertaken to give a life of Christ, he himself would undertake to write a life, beginning at the very beginning, and setting forth in order the things which occurred in that life—just what you would expect from a man who had been at school, from a skilled pen, from a literary mind. I point this out as part of the evidence, and leave you to form your own opinion as to its value.

Now we come to one of the first twelve, John, and John is unlike all the other three. John does not pay so much attention to events as to thoughts. He is not so careful about the alphabet as about the literature. John was deeply religious; he lay on the bosom of his Lord; he was the disciple whom Jesus loved. How, then, did he do his work? Precisely in conformity with

these characteristics. In John we find the deep things of God. He takes us beyond mere fact and incident, and reveals the eternal light and the infinite love. He makes us acquainted with the heart of Christ; he binds up the whole meaning and purpose of God in the short but immeasurable word Love. It is just the Gospel one would have expected from the man who reclined on his Lord's heart, and who seemed to hear the beatings of that inward life. I point this out also simply as a fact in the record; it is for you to think about it. Matthew could not have written John's Gospel. If Matthew had read John's Gospel, he would have been astounded by it, so differently may the self-same thing be represented, so immeasurable is the infinite, so impossible is it for any one mind to grasp the whole truth and any one eye to see all the beauty of that which is Divine and eternal. I should not wonder if Matthew had almost questioned the reality of John's Gospel, simply because John goes beyond the letter and beyond the event into infinite meanings and poetical interpretations. He had that high and Divine imagination which magnifies things little and mean and vulgar until they become great and grand and sublime. Mark could not have written John's Gospel; only John himself knew the mystery of this music; only John could venture into those high sanctuaries and repeat in spiritual speech the music of the Gospel of the Logos. In John's great heart was the secret of the Lord. John's scholarship was not of the letter; it was the light of genius, it was the quiet and holy miracle of sympathy, it was the triumph of love. This is the secret of all true and deep interpretation. You cannot teach a man to be an expositor of Scripture. This kind is not learned in the schools; it is learned in secret with Christ; so that the great expositor of the Scriptures is born and not made. It is in him; it is not put into him by man. As we love we read deeply; as we pray we see farthest; as we shut out the world by closing our eyelids, so do we enlarge the world and see the brightest and Divinest things in God's creation.

This, then, is the book you have to deal with, written by four different men, written by two who were of the first number of the twelve and by two who were not included in that select society, bearing upon it all the characteristics of the individual writers. Where, then, is Peter, the senior disciple, the man

who first gave Christ companionship? Has he no place in the book? Was he lifted up only to be laughed at, and then to be dropped into oblivion? Is it so that Christ treats those who first come to him and obey his voice in life? No, no. We expected Peter to be first; he is first—at the other end. Was it not mercy that spared him from being in the first four? Was it not pity that spared him from writing the story of his own shame? Think for a moment. How could he have written one of the four accounts of the life of Christ? How perplexed and bewildered he must have been all through because he saw the end from the beginning of his undertaking! Was it not mercy, I repeat, that spared him that test? Now, Paul could tell the story of his hostility and antagonism. Why? It was intellectual. Not only so—so far as it was moral—he could say about it, “Because I did it ignorantly in unbelief, I verily thought I was doing God service in all this open opposition.” But Peter had no such plea; no such excuse could have occurred to the senior disciple. He deliberately, and with profane language, denied his Master. He said, “I know not the man.” He went forth and wept out his very heart in great scalding tears in secret, and when the life came to be written, that merciful Master said, “He cannot be in the first four; he would have to tell all that shocking tragic story; let that be told by others; he shall have his place; let him wait.”

The Lord is most merciful even when we least expect it. Did we but know it, there is always mercy in the very thing which we regret most. When we are kept in the background it is mercy that appoints our lot. There is something in it we cannot understand. If I say, “Why am I not of the first four? I can find no reason for not being there; I am older, abler, better, stronger than any of them; why am I not there?” hear thy Lord saying unto thee, “Because of my mercy. Something would occur thou dost not fully foresee; the background is thy place just now. I appoint the lot and the estate of man; if thou art at the front or at the back, it is my doing.” The Lord exalteth and the Lord abaseth, and men’s lives are not thrown together by mishap and by chance and by lottery. There is a Divinity in all this masonry and shaping and upbuilding. Thou shalt have thy place. It is not man that is keeping you back. You are fretting

and chafing in secret because you are not in the head place ; it is not men that are keeping you down ; they could not do so. God knows that it is better for you and me to be where we are than to be elsewhere. Wait in the prison till Pharaoh sends for thee, poor injured one. Wait in the stable till the Lord sends for thee, thou complaining colt. Wait on the Lord, I say, and know that thy place is not of thine own carving and forcing, is not a birth and expression of thine own foolish and selfish urgency, and that the bounds of our habitation are fixed by God.

Is Peter wholly overlooked and allowed to drop out of view ? No ; Peter's record is in the book ; he has his own place ; he writes two letters which no other man could have written ; they are the letters of a penitent. His pen is dipped in the blood of a broken heart, and truly the music is grand in massiveness and passion. He takes his place without a murmur ; even in the arranging of the book, with which he had nothing to do, he seems to be in his right place. The others were first ; he comes last ; the pinnacle hath an honour as well as the foundation. The Evangelists have written, the acts of the apostles have been recorded, Paul has argued, James has lectured ; and when they are all done the old disciple comes forward, to be followed by the only man who could complete the new and final revelation of God's love. There is a rhythm in this order which is not mechanical, or, to change the figure, the stones thus placed were set up by him who built all things, and he who built all things is God. It is not every hand that has skill to write a programme ; it is not every man who is equally clever at all points. There is a genius of order, and that genius of order is wonderfully honoured in the very succession of the books of the New Testament. I want to hear what Peter has to say. He is kept back from view till they are all done, and when they have all laid their pens down, he says, "I will write you what I know of this great Christ," and Peter's epistles are full of the blood of Christ. It is Peter who calls it "precious blood" ; it is Peter who sets it above silver and gold and all corruptible things ; it is he who magnifies the Cross of Christ and the blood of Christ with the pathos that can only come out of a heart not lightly wounded on the surface, but struck through and through with the darts of the enemy.

Read the book in the light of these suggestions, and when you have so read it tell me how you are to account for it.

Now, resuming the thread of the last discourse and completing it in a moment, let me ask, What was Jesus Christ's relation to the whole—to the Old Testament, the writings that were said to be inspired? He had a very difficult part to play with that book, in the hands of those who were the leaders and teachers of the people. He came forward, and he said, "I observe those books in your hands; all that they contain is sufficient to guide men to God." Where was his mission—what did he come to do? Again and again he said, "There is enough in these books to lead you to God"; so then what work was set out for him to accomplish? He said, "Search the Scriptures, for they are they which testify of me." When a man asked him the way of salvation, he said, "How readest thou? what is written in the law?" When a man cried from hell that some one might be sent to his father's house to convert his five brethren, the answer was, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them: if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." So he made his task most difficult. He said, "There is enough in those writings to enlighten the mind and lead the heart to the Eternal Father," and then he claimed that every jot and tittle in those writings bore entirely upon himself. He set himself forth as the interpretation and completeness of everything that was written. So the book is there, and the Man is there, and judgment is called for. This Man never smoothed down difficulties, but rather seemed to create them, to suggest points of challenge and comparison. There was no fear in his mind and heart: he spoke like a man who was addressing himself to a great question, every point of which he had fully comprehended. Not only so—he is not merely general in his application of the Old Testament to himself: he is minute and special and particular. So he takes up the volume of Isaiah; he finds the place where it is written, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, unto the poor, and to those that are bound and are heavy-laden." He closes the book, hands it to the minister, and says, "I am he of whom the prophet did thus write." He says, "The stone which the

builders rejected, the same is become the head stone of the corner." He applies, therefore, not the whole Scriptures only, but minute and separate portions of the whole record, to himself, so that men who might have been bewildered by a great breadth of application had the opportunity of testing him very severely at special points which he himself indicated as crucial and final.

Then he gave unity to the book. We thought that as it had been the work of some thirty or forty men, it was more or less incoherent—we were to make of it what we could—it was something built at different ages and periods of the world's history, and one part had next to no relation to the other. Jesus Christ said, "All these books are one; I am the all-uniting and all-illuminating centre; you can trace every mystery in the Scriptures to me; you can find the fulfilment of every hopeful prophecy in my kingdom. Where shadows startle you, I am behind them; where types and symbols perplex you, you will find their meaning in my ministry and priesthood." So the book is not many, but one: from beginning to end it is the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. We upon whom the ends of the age have come are not to read the book to find what meaning we can put upon it: the meaning is settled, and it is Christ, and Christ only. The creation means Christ; the promise to shattered man in Eden means Christ; the sacrifices and all the ceremonies of Judaism mean Christ; the music of Israel's sweetest harp means Christ; the light that gleams and burns in prophecy means Christ; the Song of songs rolls its tender strain around Christ; the burdens of the later seers were burdens of Christ. No page did Christ disclaim; no prophet did Christ disown; he appropriated all names and figures and symbols of beauty: he was the Root and the Offspring of David, he was the Bright and Morning Star, he was the Flower of Jesse and the Plant of Renown, he was the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley, he was the Shepherd of the Flock, and the Redeemer of those who were in the hand of the enemy; he had not where to lay his head, yet he was perfumed with the powders of the merchants. He sat on the well of Jacob weary with his journey, yet his chariot was of the wood of Lebanon. His face was marred more than any man's, yet to the eyes of love his countenance was white and ruddy, and among ten thousand he was chief. He was thirsty, yet he knew

the nations were preparing for him spiced wine of the pomegranate. He was despised and rejected of men, yet he filled the firmament as One who was to be the Desire of all nations. What wonder, then, that when he met the distressed ones going to Emmaus, and when he heard the complaint of their ignorance and their sigh of suppressed dismay, he began at Moses and all the prophets and expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself?

We are invited now to read the Bible in the light of the suggestion that it all means Christ, all its ends are to be bound up in Christ, all its difficulties and mysteries are to find their solution in the Son of God. As he proceeded, would God we had been there to hear the wondrous word! The hearts of the dejected burned within them. That is the secret of inspiration; that is how you know whether the Bible is inspired or not—does it make your heart burn—does it inspire you? If so, the cause must be equal to the effect. Christ therefore began at Moses and the prophets and the Psalms, and expounded unto the disciples in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. No other man dare have claimed so tattered a book; no other man dare have said, "All these writings, by so many different hands, and at so many periods of the world's history, converge as to their meaning and fulfilment in my person and ministry." We should have needed a neater book, a smaller and completer treatise; but he takes in all the varied writing, all the tumultuous and miscellaneous literature, and he says, "I bind it into one unity and compose it into one unique and indestructible system of my personality and my ministry." He put the key into the drooping hands of the men walking to Emmaus; at its touch the lock sprang back, and a liberty wide as heaven came in place of their limitation and distress. When therefore I read this book, I now read it as a complete book: I take Christ with me from the beginning to the end. When the writing is very hard, the reading very difficult to my ignorance, and I want information, I will wait until I see Christ himself, and then I may have some hard questions to put to him—hard to me, not to him—everything is hard to a man who cannot see one hour ahead—but what can be hard to him who breathes eternity and the measure of whose strength is infinite?

Without Christ the Bible is chaos ; with Christ it is order, and music, and light.

Hitherto we have been discussing what may be called the negative side of the great questions which have come under our consideration. We now advance to consider the positive aspect of these great inquiries and problems.

In the Bible you find men who say positively that God has spoken to them, and has told them to speak to other people in his name. They do not merely *suppose* that God has spoken to them ; they say they have received messages from his mouth, that his hand touched their lips, and that they have spoken the very words which he told them to deliver. Now, on the face of it, this is an astounding declaration. It has no counterpart in our own experience, we imagine. Judging by ourselves, by all our communications with the unseen world and the Divine intelligence, we should say that no such action ever took place in any human instance. Let us consider that a moment. If a man were to arise, and say, "God came to me last night, touched my mouth, and gave me a certain message. He asked me what I saw ; I told him what appeared to me in the visions of the soul, and the consequence of it all is that he has sent me to you this morning to speak directly and positively in his name." I ask you, as a Christian assembly, how you would receive that man. You would unhesitatingly pronounce him a fanatic or a lunatic. There is not a soul here, probably, that would regard that man as other than in some degree insane. Yet we who would so speak about a contemporary gather reverently, and, we believe, with intelligent adoration and hopefulness, around a book which says in every tittle of it, "God wrote me ; God spoke me ; God endorsed me." Is it antiquity that we are worshipping ? Is it old English terminology that gets the better of our veneration, and makes us think that this book is Divine, and this spelling is holier than all other orthography ? Or is it (let the heart answer and the intelligence speak) a deep, solemn, childlike conviction that in the Bible we have God's own plainly declared word, and that it is all we require for earth and time, for heaven and eternity ? I ask you to consider that question, lest you should be labouring under some delusion. Let us be healthy in

our thinking, let us be sound and real in our intercourse and convictions, and then we may expect to enjoy all that belongs to sound health, to robust intelligence, to complete and earnest conviction.

Consider the times in which the Bible writers lived, as compared with our own days. Consider the all but infinite silence of their intellectual region. Is there any silence anywhere now? The air is full of noise; silence is a banished spirit, a historic angel. We live amid the dinning clatter of the fussiest civilisation that ever prevailed. That may account for a good deal that is peculiar in our thinking. Every wheel creaks, every footstep has an echo; the noise is so rude and deafening that some of its more tired victims long for the release of that wide land where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. There seems to have been no noise in the old times—the Bible days—but now there is no quietness. One has a fiery tongue, another a prophecy, another a patent, another a telegraph, another a telephone. Great buildings are put up, in which men place cunning samples of machinery; science and travel outrun one another for their respective prizes; it is all fuss, noise, rivalry, neck-and-neck work. It is enough to make God speechless. How can he be heard amid the uproar of our unintelligent and urgent fuss? He built a pulpit; he meant that pulpit to be wide as the horizon, high as heaven. We have made it six feet long by four and a half, and have told men to build a little, fussy, noisy thing outside it called a platform, where sweltering rhetoricians encounter the continual peril of rhetorical suicide. God said it was to be all pulpit, all church; men were to preach in the pulpit and sing in it, and be glad in it; it was to be the greatest and grandest thing under the stars. Now we lock it up; now we diminish its dimensions; now we say that certain things are more becoming the platform than the pulpit. Ah me! Every morning has its snowfall of newspapers, every evening its special editions and its latest telegrams. There is a financial pandemonium on the exchange, and a theological Bedlam in the church. Every man knows now everything better than everybody else and uses the speech of infallibility in protesting that he is the numblest of creatures. The whole air is lacerated by the cries of human turbulence; cursing and praying, lying and

preaching, oaths and brawls, songs of hell and psalms of heaven, heighten and aggravate the swelling discord. What wonder if, amid all this, we say, "God hath not spoken; there is no God to speak"? We have filled the atmosphere with dust, and we have made the dust move by the breath of our noise until it has become quite a storm, and then, having created all this tempest of violence round about us, we wonder who ever can believe that God has spoken to the human race. To whom does God speak—to the blustering maniac, or to the trembling worshipper? He says, "To this man will I look: to the man who is humble and of a contrite heart, who trembleth at my word."

Consider the times in which the Bible writers lived. Contrast their times with ours. Their days were long, calm, lighted up clearly to the very last; their shadow was a kind of secondary light. The old Bible man went straight up to heaven in spirit, and asked God what he was to do, and God told him. The altar fire never went out; the Bible saint took his battle orders direct from God—stored away his banner in God's sanctuary till he wanted it again. The great prophets waited daily at the gate of heaven, and panted for God as the hart panteth for the water-brooks. You can hardly imaginatively conceive the difference between those times and our own. It was the day of silence; God's going was heard in the wind; the clouds were the dust of his feet; the silence was too deep and grand to be the hush of human making; it was the very peace of God, the solemn quietness of infinite rest. Things were then seen in their Divine relations, not in their human contractions and meanness. Then there were no guide books to the mountains that are round about Jerusalem; there are now. Now the British excursionist asks, "How high is that hill?"—the hill about which the Psalmist said, "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people." In the two voices you have the two revelations. The English excursionist, with his month's holiday heavily on his hands, asks about the geological formation of the hills concerning which the old man said, "The strength of the hills is his also"—a greater and holier comment. Oh, if Moses could now go to Sinai, and see the kind of people that are taken there, the whole thing would be explained. The grand old prophet, grim as the rock, with his

torrent of beard grey as foam, would look up for God ; and if we were there, we should be putting little pieces of stones in small wallets, and buying the wood that saw Christ's tears, with Hebrew inscriptions on it, and placing the same in our drawing-rooms. The times explain everything : fuss, and excursion, and noise, and rattle, and panic, and dissolution, and bank failure, and bankruptcy, and political crises, and agonies of all sorts and kinds, making the air a great swirl and torment ; and the long-ago yesterday, when the mountain was petrified poetry, when the rocks were unhewn altars, when the hills were libraries, and the winds great mighty organs that could thunder and tremble and wail and cry.

The Bible man saw the religious aspect of material nature ; the present-day man sees the material aspect of supposedly Divine things. We linger now where the prophets wept and prayed, and ask when the steamboat leaves, and when the train comes in, and we are the men who want to drag down the heavens, and make trade with the stars. Which is to be the rule, the old faith or the present unbelief ? The ancient heroism or the present self-idolatry ? Moses went up the mountains alone and in solitude, Ezekiel paced the way of the river alone, Isaiah saw the King in his beauty when there was nobody with him, and long before the city had lighted its daily fire, Daniel had thrown up his window eastward, and communed with the infinite, silent Holy Spirit. Do you know what silence is ? You cannot know it in the city. I saw it, if I may so say, in the depths and on the heights of the grand Simplon Pass. There and then I understood the Bible ! No human creature to be seen, no human voice to be heard, no human habitation to be descried ; the great rocks, the clouds brilliant in their untainted bloom, the scream of birds, the warbling of the stream as it made its way down the deep ravine to some broader water, the snow here, yonder, notwithstanding the fierce glow of an all but intolerable sun—alone—there I felt that if I did not make a noise with my own going, the silence would speak to me like a ghost. I understood it then. But the moment one other traveller came, the spell was broken, the church dissolved, and the Simplon Pass became a common way.

How can I help myself in that same direction ? By such

solitude as is possible to me, by getting into quietness and silence, by being alone a good deal. If thou dost live only on the street, amid the rattle of bad pianos and the chatter of worse talkers, then thou dost know nothing of all the old mystery that made the Bible. When you are most alone, you will have most of God. We have been growing in the human direction. There is nothing more unlike the Bible than our newspaper to-day: it is all event and rattle and procession and march and noise and battle—and lies. We have come into a material age: we are developing the mountains. The old men made altars of them and developed themselves. That is the difference; that the explanation. Do I complain? No. The pendulum must go both ways, or it is not swinging right. You must have the Divine period, and you must have the human period; the spiritual and the material. Both have their places in this great mystery of human development; only do not say that the one is complete without the other. We need the Bible; we need the daily newspaper as well now. We need all the Biblical prayer; we need all the present-day industry and ingenuity and enterprise and thrift and skill. Do not separate the one from the other: it is the pendulum's oscillation—not this point and not that, but the complete, geometric, regular swing that ticks off your moments, and tells you how the ages are being spent.

It is thus you must read the Bible. The Bible is two books. You say the Bible contradicts itself. So it does—within the narrow, little, miserable limits which men put down for their judgments. There is Calvinism in the Bible? Yes. And Arminianism? Yes. There is one man in the Bible who says, "Faith—faith—faith," and another who says, "Works—works—works,"—are they both right? Both are perfectly right. So in the old time we had the quietness and the silence, the rich psalm and the noble prayer, and the heroic self-sacrifice; to-day we have energy, industry, mechanical contrivance, great engineering skill: we are all busy from morn till eve, so busy that we resent intrusion—we have no time to talk about aught but the business of the immediate hour. And both states of life, properly understood and rightly treated, go to make up God's meaning of human history and human destiny.

The little peddling question which many men would like me

to answer, if I could, is this: How did God speak to the prophets—did he speak to them face to face and visibly? How far were the prophets inspired—were the very words, the very spelling, the punctuation even, given to the prophets—is every comma in the Bible an inspired comma, or is the semicolon more inspired than the comma? The little question of a little mind. The men who ask such questions are not in earnest: they are not blood questions, they are surface inquiries, they are of the nature of gossip and twaddle, they do not come up out of the burning, aching heart. What does that heart ask? Another kind of question altogether. The question which I put to the Bible, and about the Bible, is this: Do you inspire me? If so, you are yourself inspired. I enlarge that question in justice to the Bible, because there may be something in me that prevents the full expression of the inspiration that is in the Holy Bible, and I ask, What has the Bible done in those lands which have read it most and loved it most? Does the reading of the Bible ennoble man, lift up the mind, quicken the imagination, re-ignite the best hopes, sustain the holiest ambitions? Does the Bible lead me to undo the heavy burden, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick? Does the Bible give me all the inspiration of its own infinite charity? If so, the inspiration of the Bible is an undoubted and absolute fact. You judge the tree by its fruits, and you do well; judge the book by the results which come from its careful, patient reading, and from the arduous endeavours to give practical interpretation to its most sacred and difficult precepts.

How is it that God does not write a Bible now? How is it that God does not make another sun now? Is the old sun worn out? Why does not God write an addendum to the Bible? What addendum could he write? He has spoken upon every great subject, and he has told us everything needful to their understanding and out-living. You cannot mention one great theme on which there is not more written than we have yet studied or carried out. I will tell you when the addendum will come, as I have told you aforetime. I can give the very day and date on which you will receive a new Bible. When the old one has been literally and spiritually obeyed, when its injunctions have all been carried out in their spirit and

meaning, when the present Bible is exhausted as to its spiritual interpretation, its intellectual enlightenment, and its moral demands. When we can honestly go to the Lord who wrote the Bible, and say, "We have done it all; we have completed the curriculum of duty and service; there is not a letter in it which we have not fulfilled," then he will hand us the second volume of his gracious revelation.

Instead of saying, "There is a God; go and find him," or instead of saying, "We can intellectually prove that there is a God," we have started the argument from the exactly opposite point. Our course of inquiry has lain along this line, namely, "Here is the universe; how do you account for it? Here is human life, with its tragedy and comedy, its multitudinousness, yet its unity, its disorder and chaos, and yet its organisation, society scattered all over the face of the globe, always in contention, yet always in progress—how do you account for it? Here is the Bible, written by some thirty or forty people, who lived in different ages, some of whom had no idea of what the others had written, some of whom could have had no idea as to what the others would write—a book without preface and without index, which is to-day working such mighty wonders in the thinking and in the general culture and civilisation of the globe—how do you account for it?" That is the argument which we have been endeavouring to elaborate.

We have found that one Person at least has risen, and said, "The universe, life, the Bible, Christ, all that is great, mysterious, solemn, beautiful, is to be accounted for by the words, In the beginning, God." Now the question arises, and comes up, indeed, for some sort of settlement—When you say *God*, do you not simply add one mystery to a great number already in existence? Do you not rather increase the light, or the darkness, as the case may be? Might it not be as intelligible to say, "The universe is to be accounted for by a great Secret"? Might it not even to some be as intelligible to say, "All things are to be accounted for by an inscrutable power called A B C"? Do we not simply mention a name, and leave the mystery exactly where we find it? That is the question I propose now to discuss—I hope, in some degree, to settle.

My first answer is that, in saying, In the beginning, God, we do not use a name only. Otherwise, then A, B, C might be just as intelligible, yet as useful, as the other letters, G, O, D. We do not, however, use a name only; we go far beyond a mere appellation. We have not a name only, but a character, and upon the quality of that character does the settlement depend. There is a very full revelation of the character of God given in the Bible, and it is so given as to come down to our own level, so that human reason can look at it, can look at what may be called even its extreme points. The character is not written upon the radiant clouds and in characters too minute for human vision to decipher. God is so delineated in the Bible as to be in our streets, in our houses, to be actually in the sanctuary of our own consciousness, so that human reason can look at him and consider the character which is portrayed, and pronounce almost complete and authoritative judgment upon it. Not only is this true. There is another fact which, in my estimation, has much to do with the whole consideration of this question. Not only is the character of God delineated in the Bible, and not only is it such a character as no human imagination, in my opinion, could have conceived, but it is precisely such a character as human imagination has been incessantly and vainly endeavouring to get rid of. I have, therefore, now to state the character of God as revealed in the Bible, and to ask you to follow me attentively in the portrayal, and to ask at last whether such a God could have sprung out of merely human fancy.

In the Bible God is represented as being at once the mightiest, and, in some respects, the weakest of all beings. Observe the self-contradiction and the consequent audacity, if not blasphemy, of the conception. Supposing that the human mind could have conceived of God as the mightiest of all beings, it did not lie within that imagination to conceive him also as the weakest, because the one idea would, in human reasoning, of necessity exclude the other. He is God over all, omniscient, infinite in strength and in skill, yet the meanest human heart can shut him out. The heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, yet he will enter the broken heart, and take up his habitation in the contrite spirit. Angels and archangels adore him, seraph

and cherub burn and glow in his presence, and do obeisance to his power, yet my human heart and yours can shut him out, and cause him to say, wet with midnight dew, cold with nocturnal chill, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man open the door, I will come in." This is the conception. I ask you whether it is a conception possible to the human mind. One or the other might be, but to conjoin the two, to clothe him with omnipotence, yet to keep him outside the heart door, unable to open it, is a kind of conception not native, so far as I know of human literature, to the human mind.

More than this; God works along the line of his weakness, and continually shows his humiliation, when he might work along the line of his strength, and show the grandeur and terribleness of his majesty. How is he represented in the Bible? He has thunderbolts in his uplifted hand. He has tears in his pitying eyes. What human imagination could conceive the two ideas? He counteth the number of the stars, and because he is great in power, not one faileth, yet his vineyard is full of thorns and briers, and the tower thereof is thrown down. He doeth as he pleaseth amongst the armies of heaven, yet the husbandmen shut him out of his own fields and slay his Son with the sword. He is clothed with honour and majesty, yet he is grieved, afflicted, disappointed, sore in heart. The question is, Could any human imagination have conceived these two self-contradictory and mutually excluding ideas? Given the possibility that one of them could have arisen in the human mind, who can account for the miracle that the precisely opposite idea and conception also occurred to the same intelligence?

Not only so—the mystery grows. God himself voluntarily and lovingly spares the very race that rejects and dishonours him. He preserves and nourishes and entreats a sinful race, when he might enjoy unbroken and ineffable delight with the spirits that have kept their first estate. Why bear with a race of rebels? You would not. Why not crush them, and dwell with the unfallen and loyal hosts of the heavenly world? Yet sinners are spared, the life of mischief-makers is prolonged, rebels are pitied, and tokens of love are given to them by the God who has a sword and thunderbolts, and lightnings, and judgments, and maledictions, and the key of hell. How is this? Has human

imagination raised itself to this infinite compassion, spared a sinful world, and in the poetry of its highest moods redeemed a race by an ideal atonement? Is it possible? If human imagination has done this transcendent work, it must have done some other work which will be in proportion to its infinite excellence. Where is that other and competing work? We have a right to demand it; we do demand it. We pit an author against himself; we say, this was his early work, this the work of his middle period, and these are the productions of his declining years. We can never compare him with any other artist; he himself alone may be his parallel. If we have therefore this rule of reasoning amongst ourselves in other matters, why not apply it in this higher inquiry? I press it. If human imagination has conceived this God, where is the next and competing work which that human imagination has produced? If this conception is the work of human imagination, then human imagination has been declining ever since. It began with a glorious dream; it has ended in nightmare and insanity. Tell me that the architect who built St. Peter's in Rome has nothing else to show than a series of dog-kennels to prove that he built the swelling dome and magnificent walls of that great church; could I believe it? I should doubt it. So that when you tell me that this God is a human fancy, I ask for human fancy number two and three and four, that I may pit the artist against himself, and ask the dreamer for a succession of his dreams, that I may know how far he can justify himself by the multiplicity and variety of his work.

More than this: we have in the Bible a God who has created a scheme of providence which, viewed in such portion as is visible within the horizon of time, afflicts the human mind with a sense of utter confusion and utter inability on its part to bring it into order and peace. The Bible acknowledges that righteousness is thrown down in the streets, that the wicked are not in trouble as other men, that they have more than heart could wish; yet it asserts that God is all-powerful, that he is presiding over a vast and complicated scheme of things, that he rules an economy of laws, and forces, and compensations, out of which, as out of primeval chaos, he will bring light and order, beauty and rest. The Bible asserts this in the face of appearances which would

cover both the theory and the theorist with utter ridicule and contempt. How dare human imagination create a conception which is falsified by everyday life and by our own little experience? What fool is he who sets up a theory which every fact on the streets overthrows, condemns, and despises? This is what the Bible does; it sets God upon the circle of the earth, it puts the reins of the universe into his hands, it tells us that all things are working together for good, it begs us to give God time that he may sweep the whole cycle of his own thought and movement, and it declares that all these conflicting forces shall be caught up in a grand astronomic movement that shall sphere them like stars, and make them glow, and burn, and revolve like completed constellations of light. Is it in the power of human genius to conceive two such contradictory ideas?

Now these considerations, accumulating themselves as they now begin to do into an impossibility as against the claims of human imagination, are further strengthened by the fact that, notwithstanding all these appearances of weakness, disorder, defeat, and humiliation, the God of the Bible never lowers the standard of righteousness, and never makes unequal and undignified terms with his enemies. He never says, "I must lower the standard if you will not come up to it." He never says, "Then I must be the party that shall make all the concessions, and we will change the whole moral standard in order to accommodate ourselves to human imbecility and pollution." Never. The standard is purity of heart, absolute righteousness, holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. So then, according to the theory that the God of the Bible is a human imagination, we have a corrupt humanity, known to be such by personal consciousness and universal observation and experience—we have a corrupt humanity conceiving an incorruptible Divinity, an unholy heart projecting out of its own thoughts an infinitely holy God, an imagination the feebleness of whose wing is proved by every other effort it has made, soaring into the very heaven of heavens, unwearied by the infinite distance, undazzled by the essential light, dictating a description of God in terms the sublimity of whose eloquence is only surpassed by the fascination of their music; and, having performed once for all this miracle of miracles, it subsides not only into commonplace intellectually, but into confusion and rebellion

morally. Can you believe in such a possibility? Then, indeed, greater is your faith than the religion of Christ asks it to be.

There have been many gods and lords, have there not? Yes, many, of the human imagination, as pagan literature so abundantly testifies; but they betray their origin so obviously as to do away with the necessity of serious argument. We can see how they came to be, we can weigh them and measure them; we can account for them, and, as Sir William Hamilton said, "A God that can be understood is not a God at all." But even here we must be just: even such gods as we find in heathendom may be distorted figures of an original revelation, the broken memories of a sacred vision in ages far off. For God has never left himself without witness, and it is one of the charges against the men who have been unfaithful to this witness that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened: professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Truly such gods come easily enough within the scope of human imagination, so disennobled are they by their grotesqueness, so debased by sensuality, so discredited by shortsightedness; nay, more, such gods themselves are the best answers to the impious theory that the God of the Bible is the outcome of the imagination of man.

So you see when we give God as the explanation of all things, we do not use a mere name: we use a name that indicates a character, a spirit, and it is by this character that we wish the suggestion—calling it no more in the meantime—that God created the heaven and the earth and rules our life to be estimated and valued. The men of natural science to-day tell us that there is a secret, and they reverentially spell the word *secret* with a capital S. So far, so good. They tell us that there is a power, with a capital P, unknown, with a capital U—religion in typography, a kind of small altar made by large capitals. So far, I repeat, so good. Wherever I find a man who can spell secret, referring to some power in the universe he cannot understand, with a capital S, I find the beginning of the life that is right. Despair of no man who has a feeling of veneration; find

a man who cannot look upon a sunset without tears coming into his eyes, and you find a man who may not be far from the kingdom of God. Find a man who in the presence of death is silent, and his speechlessness may be a kind of negative religion. I am not content with *Secret*, though so typographically honoured. The Bible says there is a secret, and the answer to it is Father, Saviour, Redeemer, Lord. Are these but so many words? Every one of these words is a character, and that character has direct and immediate relation to our life, and that character clothes itself with abasements which bring it within our vision, and subject it even to our critical inquiry and estimate. It is a great thing to do.

The argument, then, briefly stands thus. The God of the Bible is so consistent, the same at the last as at the first, though ages intervened between the delineations given by the earliest writers and those given by the latest—so majestic yet so condescending, so righteous yet so clement, so immediately and minutely identified with human affairs, yet so infinitely raised above their debasement and contamination—so wholly unlike every other conception of the human mind, that human credulity itself is simply staggered by the suggestion that such a God was born in the imagination of man. This then is where I rest. I claim no finality; I scorn no other man's thinking. I had a universe given to me to account for. One man told me it was to be accounted for by chance, and I felt—I *felt*—that he was a fool. I had human life given to me to account for, in all zones and climes, in all ages and seas and lands. I studied it. One man told me it was to be accounted for by the law of averages, and I felt that he was a fool. I had the Bible to account for. I read it straight through, and I was told by one man that it happened to come together just as it is, that there is no purpose in it, no organic or spiritual genius and unity, and that it is a gathering up of fragments that have no mutual relation, and as I read the thing, as it got into me and made my blood tingle, I felt that he, too, was a fool. Then I came to this revelation, "In the beginning, God"—God not a name only, but a character, a spirit, a life, a reality: God is light, God is love, God is Saviour, God blessed for evermore, King of kings, Lord of lords, and I *felt* that the answer was grand enough to be true.

GENESIS.

THIS is a book of beginnings. Do not force the mind to immediate opinions upon it; let it tell out every bar of its new music, until the soul, startled by the unfamiliar tones, has become acquainted with the far-off melody and been brought to love its repetition in the hope that repetition may itself become a kind of interpretation. The mind ought not to rush with heedlessness or violence upon a book like Genesis, if only for the one reason that it is Genesis, and not Finis. Nor is there any sound reasoning in the easy philosophy which says that the Hebrew language, or other Eastern speech, is given to hyperbole, or such wealth of expression as is inconsistent with literal exactitude or arithmetical precision. What is exactitude? What is precision? In the expression of religious thought is that the right language which rebukes imagination and makes a final standard of the alphabet, or is that the right language which condemns its own inability to overtake the sacred meaning, and seeks by what is called exaggeration to express what is inexpressible? The Hebrew language is as certainly a Divine creation as is the mouth of man. "Who hath made man's mouth?" In whatever degree other and later languages may be indebted to the invention of grammarians, I cannot but find in the Hebrew tongue an instrument bearing special witness to the Divine hand. Its very amplitude is part of the fulness of all other things. It is a speech, bearing seed after its own kind, a language from which all other language has been deduced without impoverishing the original abundance. We must not, therefore, evade many a difficulty under the easy plea that Oriental languages are pictorial, redundant, imaginative, or hyperbolical. God himself is to our poor thought the great hyperbole. The universe must be an infinite exaggeration to any single part of its own entirety. The truly religious reason and emotion carries us up to a region where exaggeration is impossible, where passion is temperance, where madness is composure, where every word in human speech must be crushed into one syllable with which to begin the utterance of the unutterable. If we degrade ourselves into merely literal critics, we disqualify ourselves to judge religious truth; yet this is what men have done of set purpose, and with some show of mental vanity, actually boasting that in the suppression of feeling they would begin the study of God. Hence we have seen a huge literary apparatus in place of the shadow of an Altar clothed with radiant clouds, and a thousand critics in place of an innumerable company of worshippers. In religious study there is but one thing better than speech, and that is silence. If we have speech, it must be great speech. Words must come like strong rivers too deep to be noisy

and not like shallow brooks that fret the ear with petulant self-consciousness. It is so the Divine Hebrew speech flows through the Church; "the river of God is full of water," a most plentiful stream, worthy of the Fountain whence it flows, worthy of the Throne whither it returns.

Gen. i. 1-25.

1. In the beginning (of all things) God created the heaven (the Hebrew word for "heaven" is always plural) and the earth.

2. And the earth was without form (desolate), and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved (brooded, rather than fluttered or hovered) upon the face of the waters.

3. And God said (commanded), Let there be light: and there was light.

4. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

5. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day (period of time).

6. And God said, Let there be a firmament (expanse or expansion) in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

7. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

8. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

9. And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

10. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.

11. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

12. And the earth brought forth grass (the first calling forth of life upon the earth), and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

13. And the evening and the morning were the third day.

14. And God said, Let there be lights (luminaries or light-bearers) in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

15. And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.

16. And God made (the word is "made," not "created," pointing to different methods of construction) two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.

17. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,

18. And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.

19. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

20. And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving

creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament (the concave vault) of heaven.

21. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind : and God saw that it was good.

22. And God blessed them saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.

23. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

24. And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle (grass-eating), and creeping thing (worms, insects, and reptiles), and beast (carnivorous) of the earth after his kind : and it was so.

25. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and everything that creepeth upon the earth after his kind : and God saw that it was good.

THE UNBEGINNING BEGINNING.

WAS ever the mind so staggered and so humiliated as by this first chapter of Genesis ! The mind is plunged into infinite depths, and driven up into infinite heights, and forced with irresistible violence across infinite breadths, and then is asked by mechanical critics what it thinks of it all ! Why, of course, it cannot think. It is in the whirl of an infinite amazement ; it is humbled, abashed, and stupefied utterly. The action never pauses for a moment ; how busy are the days, and how active the night in star-lighting ; in the waters is a great stir of life ; the woods are burning with colour ; the earth is alive with things that creep ; the air vibrates with the clap of wings. Then we are called upon to say what we think of it all ! Why, what do we know about it ? We have only seen it upon paper—upon a scroll that twists and crinkles under the burden it has to carry, and that writhes because of the torment of a secret it can never tell. What do we think of it all ? First tell me what have we *seen* of it all. Nothing ! Who has seen the sun, been around him on every side, passed through his provinces, scaled his mountains, trembled in his solitudes ? Who has acquainted himself with the stars, every one of them, great and small ; the planets with their belts and rings, and the treasure hidden in their central caskets—the innumerable stars—unmeasured and immeasurable thoroughfares of glory—steeps of worlds—ocean after ocean of constellations—a way white as milk—figures as of lions and winged creatures—timid stars, timid because so small ;

burning stars, only kept from destroying us because of distance—stars that could swallow up our sun without adding a beam to their own splendour or a sprinkling of dust to their own magnitude—what do we think of them all? Especially of those we have never seen; the starry kingdoms that glow beyond every horizon that has dawned upon our dreams; every system the centre of some other system; their revolutions an eternity, their space an infinity!

What, indeed, do we know about our own earth? Nothing worth naming! We have chipped the rocks here and there, and drawn diagrams which we have sold to children, and paid carpenters for drawers to keep spars in; we have made maps of the world which we are always readjusting and recolouring: we have called common things by uncommon names; but who knows anything about the earth? Who has walked over all the ocean beds and acquainted himself with all the mystery of the sea? Who has stood a yard from the shore of his own little world, and watched the tiny boat voyaging over the sea of space? Who has seen both hemispheres at once? Who has been in both hemispheres on the same day? Who can make the wind blow from the east or west? What is the wind? Ay, poor idiot-philosopher, hot with carrying huge burdens of polysyllables, tell me what is the wind, and thy answer shall be the root of another question. Our wisdom is like a tree growing only questions, a hard fruit, hard to reach, hard to use.

A marvellous harmony, too, there is in the statement of *cause*: no guessing or supposing or humble suggestion; on the contrary, a definite and thrilling asseveration: hear it:—"God created"—"And God said"—"And God saw"—"And God called"—"And God made"—"And God set"—"And God blessed"—GOD! *That* is the cause: Personality, Mind, Purpose, Government—these are the ideas which the bold writer puts before everything and above everything. The mysteries of the creation are but shadows of the mystery of the Creator. How curious is the variety of mind! Some minds instantly fix upon the heavenly bodies, and get credit for being astronomers; others upon plants and flowers, and get credit for being botanists; others upon beasts and birds, and get credit for being naturalists—all such

minds are supposed to be very scientific and very able: but when another type of mind seizes upon the term GOD, the highest term of all, it is sneered at as theological, with a strong tinge of fanaticism. It seems to me that the theologian has undertaken the highest task of all, and that, compared with his work, all other work is child's play. But God is unknowable. So is nature; so is to-morrow; so is man; so is space. Or, if you will have it, let us say that, in the degree in which nature is knowable, God is knowable; when science advances religion goes along with it; science builds the altar at which religion prays. If nature is great, God must (reasonably and analogously) be greater; if nature displays wisdom, God must be wiser; if nature indicates power, it indicates it in such a degree as to make God all-powerful. Thus the first chapter of Genesis might have been written backwards—"The heaven and the earth had a beginning: the earth was without form and void; order came, and light, and night and day, and a great firmament, and all the host of life, and everything so good, so beautiful, so beneficent, as to be worthy of the name of GOD." The other method of statement is infinitely grander, and indeed infinitely simpler. As Christian reasoners we adopt it, as Christian worshippers. Instead of the infantile statement—"Here is a picture which must have had a painter," we name the Artist and credit him with the picture. If we remove the term GOD from this chapter, we leave behind a mystery of darkness; when we reinsert the term GOD we import the nobler mystery of light. In a very plain sense there is, so far as the visible creation is concerned, less mystery *with* a Creator than *without* one. Here, then, is the Christian standpoint, and here the Christian resting ground—God the mighty and holy Maker of all things. If the things themselves were not here, we might have some difficulty about God, but these things embody him, represent him, make him, in some degree, manifest to our naked eyes. We must not be afraid, or ashamed even, of true Deism. It is irrational, not merely sentimental, to poetise the moon and ignore the sun which she modestly reflects. What is *God* to us? Does he live? Is he only an aggregation of sublime epithets? Or, do we live and move and have our being in him? Do not let us trouble the mind with vain endeavours to define God; on the contrary, let us guard

the mind against what may too narrowly be described as "intelligent conceptions" of God, for thereby we may not lift up our intelligence to God, but drag down God to our intelligence, and so become our own idolaters. To think that it is in our power to think of GOD is to come under the influence of what may, without infinite watchfulness of the heart, become the most insidious temptation that can assail the human mind. The most intelligent conception of God would seem to me to be that God cannot be intellectually conceived. We *feel after* him. He is recognised by the heart. Whenever he comes within the lines of reason it is by a condescension so complete as almost of necessity to mislead reason, as if the dewdrop should suppose it holds the sun which it only reflects. We bow down before God. We cannot see God and live. God is great, and we know him not. A wonderful thing it was for any mind, supposing it to be but a finite thought, to introduce the word GOD into human speech. If we could think ourselves out of our familiarities back to beginnings, we should find in the introduction of this word something like a miracle in language. Once uttered, once written, it is immediately recognised as the word which the ages have been waiting for, and the mind is apt to imagine that it always knew the word, and that the word is part and parcel of its own quality—a kind of ingratitude not unknown even in strictly human education and intercourse. Yet once suggested (we should say revealed), how strong are the commendations it brings with it! Truly, things do look as if they might have been brought about by a personal and sovereign Mind. They are so wonderfully made, so balanced, so rounded, so interdependent; so huge, yet so safe; so small, yet each cared for and fed as if it were an only child; so long-continued, too, age after age, that time has no more dial space to write figures upon that will tell all the tale of duration. Yes; now that some one has put into the mind the idea of God, we cannot get rid of it. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." Reason is not humbled by this confession, but ennobled by it. Reason itself says, It must be so! Reason takes off its sandals and lays down its crook, saying, Surely this is holy ground! Reason is a worshipper. Reason has seen

space, and inferred the Infinite; reason has seen duration, and inferred the Eternal; a voice has whispered into the ear of reason the mysterious word GOD, and reason cannot silence the solemn music. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God," but the world has not accepted the fool's speech. Crime has endeavoured to upset law, yet is there infinite quietness in the order of creation. The heathen have raged and the people imagined a vain thing, yet has their rage died like a wind, and their pride been broken as a potter's vessel. Here, then, we stand. We accept the idea—GOD. We did not create it, we have tried to destroy it, yet there it is—a great light, a solemn darkness, a temple of mystery, "a deep where all our thoughts are drowned."

The practical effect of this faith has been most remarkable and confirmatory. A mysterious and gracious process of identification has completed itself in the purest and loftiest affections of the heart; so I should now have to give up a God that has involved himself in my thinking, not only with all time and space, not only with life and destiny, as they project themselves on horizons far away, but with this day's duty, with all immediate obligation, sacrifice, service, and character. GOD is not now a symbol of an imaginary kind, whose action, in my thinking, I can suspend without loss of light and force; he has become—account for it as you may—the ruling power of my life, the moral centre of my conduct, the thought which penetrates, inspires, and sanctifies me. The ease or difficulty with which a man can surrender GOD depends, if I may so say, upon the use to which he has become accustomed to put the mysterious term. If GOD has been but a nebulous and speechless dream—a veneration without a corresponding morality—the act of surrender will be as indefinite as itself. But in our case, as Christian believers and Christian teachers, GOD is in every part of our life; he has manifested himself to us; he has taken up his abode with us; the Spirit of his Son is in our hearts, crying, Abba, Father; he searches us and tries us; he acts directly and judicially upon every motive; he guides us with his eye; he besets us behind and before, and lays his hand upon us; to him our hearts aspire in instinctive as well as in reasoned prayer; the spontaneous

outstretching of our hands is towards his holy temple, if haply we may touch his strength, and feel secure because he is almighty; when we do wrong our eyes are darkened as with a cloud, and when we do well our hearts feel upon them the light of a smile. That is our case now; in such circumstances surrender would be destruction. We have, if I may so put it, gone too far in our use of God to turn away from him and yet retain our identity intact. "We live and move and have our being in God." We have passed the merely argumentative stage. "God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Whilst God was but an incipient thought—a possible superstition of the mind—we might have crushed the embryo; but we have heard a voice, and opened the door, and God has come in and has supped with us, and we with him. We are now, so to speak, involved in God, complicated with him; "partakers of the Divine nature," "partakers of his holiness." "Of him are we in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Though our minds cannot grasp his infinity, our hearts can feel his love; though our imagination cannot search his understanding, our conscience can respond to his righteousness; though we cannot explain, we can pray. Thus, God has laid hold of our highest nature, though apparently our intellect stands in rebuke, abashed before him. There are, therefore, moral considerations in any proposed surrender, as well as considerations of a merely intellectual kind, and whilst the intellectual considerations are on no account to be lowered in value and dignity, the considerations which turn towards conscience and character, which construct society upon a religious and therefore responsible basis, and insist upon making daily conduct itself into a kind of daily worship, can only, in my view, be relaxed at the peril of the very morality they aim to express. I rest in what I believe to be the Christian conception of God. It fills and satisfies, it comforts and inspires my best nature. My reason bows before it. My conscience accepts it. My heart is thankful for it; my whole soul grows towards strength and completeness under its hallowing benediction. I feel that it must be right, because it enables me to pity sin, to be kind to the unthankful and the evil, to find in every man a

brother, and to bow down with all the nations of the world, saying, "Our Father, which art in heaven."

Yes, now I look at things, they *might* have been made by God. they are vast enough, splendid enough, and harmonious enough. I do not particularly mind if they did come out of germs, molecules, and plasms which naked eyes cannot see. Very likely. They are the more wonderful for that. I never supposed that God drove up the worlds into their places like infinite loads drawn by infinite horses. "Germ" is quite a notion enough for me. The kingdom of heaven itself is like unto a grain of mustard seed, and *that* kingdom is infinitely larger than all the constellations put together. As I look upon that kingdom the constellations fade into pale sparks as if by conscious contrast. Once creation looked big—quite an enormous and awful bulk—but now that I have seen him by whom, for whom, and through whom, it was made, the stars are but pin points and the great circle but a dim shadow because of the glorious majesty of his Godhead. Matter lessens as thought enlarges, and so along this line we find the comforting truth that death is by reason of increasing life "swallowed up in victory." This would seem to be the evolution through which Biblical thought itself has passed. David considered the heavens, the moon, and the stars, and wondered that God should make account of the son of man. Peter, a man in every way likely to be impressed by bulk and force and radiance, having been with Jesus and learned of him—having seen the white flame on Tabor which Saul afterwards saw at the gate of Damascus—looked upon the infinite pomp, and predicted the noise of its departure and the smoke of its dissolution.

This marvellous development of what may be called contempt for inferior things, how magnificent soever their exterior, is characteristic of the whole process of spiritual growth, and is, indeed, a test of its progress and healthiness. A remarkable instance is found in the Apostle Paul. A mind so capacious and energetic could have glorified any sphere of human activity, yet gathering together all the privileges of ancestry, all the dignities of office, all the temptations of sense, he burned them all on the altar of the Cross, and counted their sacrifice a gain.

So much depends upon what may be called the uppermost principle or force in a man's nature. Where it is commercial, markets are universes and prices are the only recognised poetry; where it is love of physical science, the visible creation is the mind's ample heaven; where it is patriotism, the country is the only sanctuary worth saving; where it is theological, the universe is but a spark, all space is but a bubble, time has no measurable proportion to unbeginning and unending duration—the one absorbing and inspiring thought is GOD. Hence the infinite raptures of Christian experience, hence triumph over every pain which cruelty can inflict, hence the shout of victory in the very presence of death. So even thus early in our studies of the Bible—even in this architectural and almost experimental Genesis—we come upon some of the ultimate truths of practical Christianity. Are we still impressed by bulk? Is the visible creation still so huge and important a thing? Is the eye still amazed by the pomp of the nocturnal sky and the radiance of summer noondays? Or have we passed the era of childish wonder and arithmetical computation, and entered into the temple of worship and seen the Maker whose presence annihilates all things made? The creation is for children; the sanctuary is for men: matter is for the senses; thought is for the soul. This is the sign of growth. By this we know just where we are on the Divine scale. If we are still only gaping at Size and Light, we are but in a rudimentary state; we should have passed beyond this long ago, and should now be in a region that has no boundaries, in a kingdom without sun or moon, without night, without sea, without temple, where precious stones are thrust into the foundations, and gold is trodden upon as the pavement, and the one glory is “the throne of God and of the Lamb.” If we have not passed into this new Jerusalem, we have been idling away our time in laborious frivolity, heaping up the wind and gathering the waters into sieves.

Gen. i. 26-31.

26. And God said, Let us make man in our image (deliberation enhances dignity), after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27. So God created man (the Adam) in his own image; in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

28. And God blessed them (wished them well, a home word, the beginning of home!), and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish (utilise it) the earth (one sphere at a time), and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

29. And God said (the granting of a Divine charter), Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

30. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

31. And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good (lo! very good!). And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

THE MAKING OF MAN.

THERE is surely no bolder sentence in all human speech. It takes an infinite liberty with God! It is blasphemy if it is not truth. We have been accustomed to look at the statement so much from the human point that we have forgotten how deeply the Divine character itself is implicated. To tell us that all the signboards in Italy were painted by Raphael is simply to dishonour and bitterly humiliate the great artist. We should resent the suggestion that Beethoven or Handel is the author of all the noise that passes under the name of music. Yet we say, God made *man*! Look at man, and repeat the audacity if you dare! Lying, drunken, selfish man; plotting, scheming, cruel man; foolish, vain, babbling man; prodigal man, wandering in wildernesses in search of the impossible, sneaking in forbidden places with the crouch of a criminal, putting his finger in human blood and musing as to its probable price per gallon—did God make *man*? Not merely make him in some rough outline way, but make him in the Divine image and likeness as an other-self, a limited and shadowed divinity? Verily, then, a strange image is God's! Leering, gibing, mocking image; a painted mask; a vizor meant to deceive. See where cunning lurks in its own well-managed wrinkle—see how cold selfishness puts out the genial warmth of eyes that should have beamed with kindness; hear how mean motives have taken the music out of voices that

should have expressed most trustful frankness : then look at the body, misshapen, defiled, degraded, rheum in every joint, specks of corruption in the warm currents of the blood, leprosy making the skin loathsome, the whole body tottering under the burden of the invisible but inseparable companionship of death ! Is this the image, is this the likeness of God ? Or, take man at his best estate, what is he but a temporary success in art—clothier's art, schoolmaster's art, fashion's art ? He cannot see into to-morrow ; he imperfectly remembers what happened yesterday ; he is crammed for the occasion, made great for the little battle, careful about the night air, dainty as to his digestion, sensitive to praise or blame, preaching gospels and living blasphemies, praying with forced words, whilst his truant mind is away in the thick of markets or the complexity of contending interests. Is this the image of God ? Is this incarnate deity ? Is this Heaven's lame success in self-reproduction ? Oh, how we burn under the sharp questioning ! How we retire into our proper nothingness, and beg that no more words may fall upon us like whetted spears ! Yet there are the facts. There are the men themselves. Write on the low brow—"the image and likeness of God" ; write on the idiot's leering face—"the image and likeness of God" ; write on the sensualist's porcine face—"the image and likeness of God" ; write on the puppet's powdered and painted countenance—"the image and likeness of God"—do this, and then say how infinite is the mockery, how infinite the lie !

Yet here is the text. Here is the distinct assurance that God created man in his own image and likeness ; in the image of God created he him. This is enough to ruin any Bible. This is enough to dethrone God. Within narrow limits any man would be justified in saying, If man is made in the image of God, I will not worship a God who bears such an image. There would be some logic in this curt reasoning, supposing the whole case to be on the surface and to be within measurable points. So God exists to our imagination under the inexpressible disadvantage of being represented by ourselves. When we wonder about him we revert to our own constitution. When we pray to him we feel as if engaged in some mysterious process of self-consultation. When we reason

about him the foot of the ladder of our reasoning stands squarely on the base of our own nature. Yet, so to say, how otherwise could we get at God? Without some sort of incarnation we could have no starting point. We should be hopelessly aiming to seize the horizon or to hear messages from worlds where our language is not known. So we are driven back upon ourselves—not ourselves as outwardly seen and publicly interpreted, but our inner selves, the very secret and mystery of our soul's reality

Ay; we are now nearing the point. We have not been talking about the right "man" at all. The "man" is within the man; the "man" is not any one man; the "man" is Humanity. God is no more the man we know than the man himself is the body we see. Now we come where words are of little use, and where the literal mind will stumble as in the dark. Truly we are now passing the gates of a sanctuary, and the silence is most eloquent. We have never seen man; he has been seen only by his Maker! As to spirit and temper and action, we are bankrupts and criminals. But the sinner is greater than the sin. We cannot see him; but God sees him; yes, and God loves him in all the shame and ruin. This is the mystery of grace. This is the pity out of which came blood, redemption, forgiveness, and all the power and glory of the Gospel. Arguing from the outside, that is, from appearance and action, and from such motive as admits of outward expression, it is easy to ridicule the notion that God made man in his own image. But arguing from other facts, it is impossible, with any intellectual or moral satisfaction, to account for man on any other theory than that he is the direct creation of God. If I think of sin only, I exclude God from the responsibility of having made man; but when I think of repentance, prayer, love, sacrifice, I say, Surely this is God! this is Eternity! When I see the sinner run into sin, I feel as if he might have been made by the devil; but when he stands still and bethinks himself; when the hot tears fill his eyes; when he sighs towards heaven a sigh of bitterness and true penitence; when, looking round to assure himself of absolute solitude, he falls down to pray without words; *then* I see a dim outline of the image and likeness in which he

was created. In that solemn hour I begin to see *man*—the man that accounts for the Cross, the man who grieved God, the man who brought down the Christ. You have often seen that man in yourselves. Sometimes you have felt such stirrings of soul, such heavenly and heavenward impulses, such pureness of love, such outleaping of holy passion towards God and all godliness, that you have thought yourselves to be *worth* saving, even at the cost of blood ! There was no vanity in such thought, no self-exaggeration ; there was a claim of eternal kinship, a cry as of a child who felt that the Father cared for its sin and its sorrow.

Thus everything depends as usual on the point of view, and as usual we are in the first instance always tempted to take the narrow and unworthy standing ground. We have to be actually driven to high conceptions and to the true rendering of things. We are so dull of sight, so nearly deaf, so almost soulless, by reason of some great calamity which has unmade and uncrowned us, that we miss the genius and poetry of things. In everything surely there is a touch of God, could we but see the finger-print. There is some connection between the differently coloured juices of things—between the milk of the wheat stalk and the blood which has given Calvary its fame—could we but see it. O those blind eyes of ours ! they make one mistake after another ; they let God go past without seeing any outline of a presence ; they turn day into a spoiled night. Yet sometimes we get glimpses that beasts can never get. Sometimes at a bound we leave the wisest brutes down in the clay to which they belong, and listen at doors concealed by light. The first man in the Bible saw little enough, but how much the last man saw ! What a difference between the Adam of Genesis and the John of the Apocalypse ! It is easy to believe that John was made in the image and likeness of God. What eyes the man had, and ears, and power of dreaming great dreams, and in how sublime contempt he held all things called great on earth ! He saw doors opened in heaven ; he was summoned as by a trumpet to see things which must be hereafter ; he saw the throned One like a jasper and a sardine stone, and a rainbow about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald : wondrous visions rewarded the gaze of wondrous eyes—lightnings and thunderings and seven

lamps of fire burning before the throne—books of mysteries, harps, and golden vials full of odours, a rider with a bow and a crown, who went forth conquering and to conquer, white robes, golden censers, an angel with a face like the sun and his feet as pillars of fire, and a lamb as it had been slain! Look at *that* seer, if you would know in whose image and likeness man was created and made. Is there no similar apocalypse even in our narrowed experience? Are we not as truly one in the book of Revelation as we are one in the book of Genesis? When the poet dreams, the ploughman dreams. When the poet creates for his soul's highest utterance a new speech, the dumb man has a claim by right of descent to the new wealth of eloquence. When, therefore, I want to know who I am and what I was meant to be, I will not only read the book of Genesis, but peruse with the enchantment of kindred and sympathy the marvels of the infinite Apocalypse.

We cannot think of God having made man without also thinking of the responsibility which is created by that solemn act. God accepts the responsibility of his own administration. Righteousness at the heart of things, and righteousness which will yet vindicate itself, is a conviction which we cannot surrender. It is indeed a solemn fact that we were no parties to our own creation. We are not responsible for our own existence. Let us carefully and steadily fasten the mind upon this astounding fact. God made us, yet we disobey him; God made us, yet we grieve him; God made us, yet we are not godly. How is that? There is no answer to the question in mere argument. For my part I simply wait. I begin to feel that, without the power of sinning, I could not be a man. As for the rest, I hide myself in Christ. I go where he goes. He has told me more than any other teacher has ever done, and he says he has more to tell me. I acknowledge the mystery; I feel the darkness; I tremble in the tumult; but I look to Christ to bring all things into light, and crown all things with peace. This is what we call the Christian standpoint, and I deliberately and gratefully occupy it. God will answer for himself. He will not be hard upon me, for he knoweth my frame, he remembereth that I am but dust; he will not despise me because he made me

in his image and likeness. Strange, too, as it may appear, I enjoy the weird charm of life's great mystery, as a traveller might enjoy a road full of sudden turnings and possible surprises, preferring such a road to the weary, straight line, miles long, and white with hot dust. I have room enough to pray in. I have room enough to suffer in. By-and-by I shall have large space, and day without night to work in. We have yet to die ; that we have never done. We have to cross the river—the cold, black, sullen river. Wait for that, and let us talk on the other side. Keep many a question standing over for heaven's eternal sunshine.

If we would see God's conception of man, we must look upon the face of his Son—him of whom he said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." That is man ; that is the ideal humanity. It is useless to look in any other direction for God's purpose and thought. God does not ask us to imitate even our most perfect fellow-creature, except in so far as that fellow-creature imitates and exemplifies Christ. Do not let us mock one another, and tauntingly ask if we are made in the image and likeness of God ; but let us steadfastly gaze on Christ, marking the perfectness of his lineaments, the harmony of his attributes, the sublimity of his purpose, and then, pointing to him in his solitude of beauty and holiness, we may exclaim, "Behold the image of God !" We must not judge Christ by what we know of man ; we must judge man by what we know of Christ. Very wide indeed and very beneficent is the application of this thought ; its right and fearless application would regenerate social judgment and fellowship ; its acceptance would destroy all social contempt, and elevate all social thinking. We should find out the greatest man in every social grade, and judge every man and honour every man in that grade on that greatest man's account. We have unfortunately reversed this process of judgment, and have even begrudged the renown of the one on account of the obscurity of the many. Here, by analogy, whose remoteness is apparent rather than real, we touch the mystery of human greatness as represented by the majesty of Christ. The poorest man should say, "*Christ* was a man !" The slave should say, "Frederick Douglass was a slave !" The blacksmith should say, "Elihu Burritt was a blacksmith !"

The tentmaker should say, "Paul was a tentmaker!" Thus, the lowest should dwell under the shadow of the highest, not the highest be reminded of the lowliness of his origin or the obscurity of his class. He carries up his class along with him. He shows that class what its members may be and do. He is their typical man, their crowned and glorified brother. It is the same on an infinite scale with the Man Christ Jesus. Look to him if you would see the image and likeness of God. Look to him if you would estimate the value of man. We have to bear his image; we have to be what he is. Look at him, and say, each of you, *That* is what I have to be like!

Wonderful in pathos is the appeal which results from all these considerations. That appeal is to be felt rather than expressed in words. Man is God's child; man bears a signature Divine. Great things are expected of man: reasoning which approaches the quality of a revelation; service which requires Almighty power alone to exceed it; love that courts the agony of sacrifice; purity hard to distinguish from the holiness of God.

NOTES FOR PREACHERS.

MAN naturally asks for *some* account of the world in which he lives. Was the world *always* in existence? If not always in existence, how did it *begin* to be? Did the sun make itself? These are not *presumptuous* questions. We have a right to ask them—the right which arises from our intelligence, and justifies our progress in knowledge. The *steam engine* did not make itself; did the sun? *Dwelling houses* did not make themselves; did the stars? The child's *coat* did not make itself; did the child's *soul*? If it is legitimate to reason from the known to the unknown, and to establish an *à fortiori* argument in relation to common phenomena, why not also legitimate in reference to the higher subjects which are within the province of reason? At present we wish to know how the heavens and the earth came into existence, and we find in the text an answer which is *simple, sublime, and sufficient*, and is therefore likely to be *right*.

I. The answer is SIMPLE. There is no attempt at learned analysis or elaborate exposition. A child may understand the answer. It is direct, positive, complete. Could it have been *more* simple? Try any *other* form of words, and see if a purer simplicity be possible. Observe the value of *simplicity* when regarded as bearing upon the *grandest* events. The question is not who made a *house*, but who made a *world*, and not who made *one* world, but who made *all* worlds; and to this question the answer is, *God* made them. There is great risk in returning a *simple* answer to a *profound* inquiry, because when simplicity is not the last result of knowledge, it is mere *imbecility*.

II. The answer is SUBLIME. *God! God created!* (1) Sublime because far-reaching in point of *time*: in the BEGINNING! Science would have attempted a fact; religion has given a *truth*. If any inquirer can fix a *date*, he is not forbidden to do so. Dates are for children. (2) Sublime because connecting the *material* with the *spiritual*. There is, then, something more than dust in the universe. Behind all shapes there is a living image. Every atom bears a superscription. It is something surely to have the name of *God* associated with all things great and small that are around us. Nature thus becomes a materialised *thought*. The wind is the breath of God. The thunder is a note from the music of his speech. (3) Sublime because evidently revealing, as nothing else could have done, the *power and wisdom* of the Most High. All these things were *created*; they were called into existence, and therefore must be less than God, who so called them; and

if *less*, how great must their *Creator* be! We justly infer the greatness of the *artist* from the greatness of his *pictures*. Judge *God* by the same standard.

III. The answer is SUFFICIENT. It might have been both simple and sublime, and yet not have reached the point of adequacy. Draw a straight line, and you may describe it as simple, yet who would think of calling it *sublime*? Look at the rising sun pouring floods of light upon the dewy landscape: it is undoubtedly sublime, but is it credible that the landscape was *created* by the sun? We must have simplicity which reaches the point of sublimity, and sublimity which sufficiently covers every demand of the case. The sufficiency of the answer is manifest: Time is a drop of Eternity; Nature is the handiwork of God; Matter is the creation of Mind; God is over all blessed for evermore! This is enough. In proportion as we exclude God from the operation, we increase *difficulty*. Atheism never simplifies. Negation works in darkness.

The answer of the text to the problem of creation is simple, sublime, and sufficient, in relation—(1) *To the inductions of geology*. Assume that the heavens and the earth have existed for ages which arithmetic cannot number, what then? It was in the *beginning* that God's work was done! (2) *To the theory of evolution*. Assume that in some time incalculably past there was but the minutest *germ*, what then? Who created the germ? If man cannot create an oak, can he create an *acorn*?

There are some practical inferences suggested by these reflections.

First: If God *created* all things, then all things are under his *government*. This assurance should give rest and hope to the religious inquirer. Be right with the Creator, and thou hast nothing to fear from creation.

Second: If God created the heavens and the earth, then the heavens and the earth may be studied *religiously*. Science need not be atheistic. Scientific inquiry will be most successful when most *religious*. This is reasonable. Know the writer if you would really know his works. Know the *Creator* if you would profoundly and accurately know creation. The highest study is spiritual. We may know nature, and yet know nothing of God. The tailor knows my figure; does he therefore know my *soul*?

Third: If God created all things, then it is reasonable that he should *take an interest* in the things which he created. Analogy suggests this. Scripture confirms it. "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man." "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." "He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth; he toucheth the hills, and they smoke."

What has been said of creation may be said in a still loftier sense of redemption. The answer of God to the sin of the world is simple, sublime, sufficient. "God so loved the world," etc. This shows the *unity* of the works of God. All created things are made to be the ministers of man. For man the sun shines, the rain falls, the seasons revolve. "If God so clothe the grass of the field," etc.

And God said, Let there be light.

And God said, Let there be a firmament.

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together.

And God said, Let there be lights.

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature.

And God said, Let us make man.

It is not to discuss the mere science, so called, of creation that these words are put together in the form of a text. We are not about to analyse light, or discuss the chemistry of water, or the progress of animal life. It is not by these methods that we can get anything like a complete grasp of the idea of creation. The chemist works along his own brilliant line of discovery and exposition; the astronomer has his special field to explore; the geologist has a well-defined sphere to occupy. It is manifest, however, that not one of these men can tell the *whole* tale, and make a complete story of creation. Another man is wanted. A man who, though not necessarily going into formal science, sees the whole idea, and speaks of it in its unity. This man is the *theologian*. He is not a chemist, an astronomer, a geologist, a botanist—he is more: he speaks of circles, not of segments; of principles, not of facts; of causes and purposes rather than of effects and appearances. Not that the latter are excluded from his study, but that they are so wisely included in it as to be put in their proper places.

We may see the meaning of this more clearly by taking other ground. Take the idea of the political state. At the head of affairs set the prime minister; now it is obviously possible that in the cabinet over which he presides there may be men very much better qualified than himself for the various departmental services. He may not be half so good a financier as the chancellor of the exchequer; he may be ill-qualified to administer the affairs of the admiralty, or of the poor law board; he may be ignorant of many of the details of the postal service; he may be utterly incapable of giving a sound opinion upon any legal question,—yet his is the supreme mind in the cabinet! The cabinet would be disorganised were his influence to be withdrawn. In an emphatic sense he is a *statesman*: he carries in his mind the state as a *whole*: with an intellectual energy and rapidity known only to the highest genius, he collects the sense of all his counsellors, he settles their advices into their proper proportions, and by the peculiar inspiration which makes him their master, he takes care that the part is never mistaken for the whole. Observe, each man may actually be abler in some point than his chief, yet not one of all the brilliant staff would dispute the supremacy of that chief's mind. It is one thing to be a politician, another to be a statesman.

Apply the illustration to the case in hand. The theologian does not, in his proper character, deal with mere departments. One man is superior to him in chemistry; another may actually laugh at his astronomy or geology; a third may despise him when he talks about animal or botanical physiology,—yet he may know more of the *wholeness* of creation than any of them, and may give the ablest of them the password which opens the central secret of the universe. The aurist studies the ear, and the oculist the eye, others

devote themselves to special studies of the human frame, but there is another and completer man to whom we hasten when the mystery of *life* itself becomes a pain which may end in death. That other and completer man would himself send sufferers of special maladies to men who had made those maladies the subject of exclusive study, yet in his knowledge of the mystery of life he might excel them all.

In some such way would we hint at the proper position of the theologian. He may or may not be a chemist ; he may or may not know some particular science ; but if he be a Divinely inspired theologian—not a mere sciolist in Divinity, a pedant in letters—he will see farther than any other man, he will hear voices which others do not hear, and will be able to shape the politics of class students into the sublime and inclusive statesmanship of a sacred philosophy.

What, then, so far as we can gather from the words before us, has Biblical theology to say about creation, material and human ?

I. THAT CREATION IS AN EXPRESSION OF GOD'S MIND. It is the embodiment of an idea. It is the form of a thought. Theology says that creation has a beginning, and that it began at the bidding of God. Theology says, You see the heavens ? They are the work of God's fingers. You see the moon and the stars ? God ordained them : all things are set in their places by the hand of God. He laid the foundations of the earth, and covered it with the deep as with a garment. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth ; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. You see the cedars of Lebanon ? God planted them. You see the moon ? God set her for seasons. You behold the sun ? Though he be the king of day, yet he knoweth his going down. You see the high hills ? God hath made in them a refuge for the wild goats. You see the fir-trees ? God hath found in them a house for the stork. "O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all : the earth is full of thy riches." Now this is very unscientific in its form of expression, yet it is the declaration of theology. Theology could not speak otherwise. Theology would dwarf itself if it went into formal statement of so-called scientific truth. But what does theology do ? She sends the chemist on her errands, she calls the astronomer to consider the heavens, and sends the geologist to read the story of the rocks. They are not rebels ; they are friends and allies and chosen servants. Yet not one of them could by any possibility do the *whole* work. The geologist and the astronomer talk different languages. The chemist and the botanist but dimly comprehend each other. It is the theologian that must call them to a common council, and proclaim their conclusions in a universal tongue.

Granted that there is mystery in the doctrine that all things were created by the word of God. This is not denied. It is felt, indeed, to be a necessity of the case. On the other hand, whatever mystery may be on the side of theology, *there is nothing but mystery* on the side of atheism.

II. That creation, being an expression of God's mind, MAY FORM THE BASIS FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF GOD'S PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER. If we see something of the artist in his work, we may see something of the Creator in

creation. The works of God proclaim his eternal and incommunicable *sovereignty*. "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor, hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?" Thus men are put back: they are ordered off beyond the burning line which lies around the dread sovereignty of God. If a man would trespass that line, he would encounter the thunder of questions which would make him quail: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" "Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days, and caused the dayspring to know his place?" "Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the depth?" "Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?" "Where is the way where light dwelleth?" "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?" "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus, with his sons?" And still the questions would come like the shocks of a rising storm, until the proudest speculator might quake with fear, and totter into darkness that he might hide the shame of his pride. As a mere matter of fact, man cannot approach the dignity of having himself *created* anything. He is an inquirer, a speculator, a calculator, a talker, but not a *creator*. He can *talk about* creation. He can reckon the velocity of light, and the speed of a few stars. He can go out for a day to geologise and botanise; but all the while a secret has mocked him, and an inscrutable power has defied the strength of his arm. The theologian says, that secret is God, that power is Omnipotence.

There is more than sovereignty; there is *beneficence*. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." "He sendeth springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches." "He hath not left himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." "Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." "Thou openest thine hand; they are filled with good." "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." This is a step downwards, yet a step upwards. Over all is the dread sovereignty of God—that sovereignty stoops to us in love to save our life, to spread our table, and to dry our tears; it comes down, yet in the very condescension of its majesty it adds a new ray to its lustre. The theologian says, This is *God's* care; this is the love of the *Father*; this bounty is an expression of the *heart of God*. It is not a freak of what is called *nature*; it is not a sunny chance; it is a purpose, a sign of love, a direct gift from God's own heart.

III. That God's word is its own security for fulfilment. God said, Let there be, and there was. "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." This is the word which

alone can ultimately prevail. "As the rain cometh down from heaven, and returneth not thither," etc. We see what it is in the *natural* world; we shall see what it is in the *spiritual*. "I am the Lord; I will speak, and the word that I will speak shall come to pass." "The word of God liveth and abideth for ever." "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away." "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" "What his soul desireth, even that he doeth."

This is of infinite importance—(1) As the *hope* of righteousness; (2) as the *inevitable doom* of wickedness.

IV. That the word which accounts for the existence of *Nature* accounts also for the existence of *Man*. "Know ye not that the Lord, he is God? it is he that made us, and not we ourselves." "O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou our Potter; and we are the work of thy hand." "Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us?" "We are the offspring of God." "In him we live, and move, and have our being."

See what a great system of *unity* is hereby established. He who made the *sun* made *me*!

How to *begin* to write the Bible must have been a question of great difficulty. The beginning which is given here commends itself as peculiarly sublime. Regard it as you please, as literal, historical, parabolical, it is unquestionably marked by adequate energy and magnificence of style. Judging from the method of the writer, I should at once say, the aim of this man is not to tell with scientific precision the natural history of creation; he has some other undeclared purpose in view. He finds that he must say *something* about the house before he says anything about the tenant, but he feels that that something must be the least possible. Hence we have this rugged but majestic account. In reading this wonderful chapter we must receive several memorable impressions:—

First: *This account of creation is deeply religious*, and from this fact I infer that the whole book of which it is the opening chapter is intended to be a religious and not a scientific revelation. If a natural philosopher had undertaken to write an account of the earth, he would have begun in a totally different tone, and he would have been justified in so doing. A work on geography that began with the analysis of a psalm or prayer would be justly considered as going out of its proper sphere, and in all probability we should regard its unseasonable piety as a subtraction from its scientific value. The object of Moses is simply and absolutely *religious*. We do not say that a man is an atheist because he writes upon geology without announcing a religious creed. So we ought not to say that a man is an ignoramus because he writes a religious book without any pretence to scientific learning. This man is resolved on reading all things from the God-side; he will read them downwards, not upwards; he will begin at the fountain, not at the stream; and in claiming to do this he is evidently exercising a legitimate discretion, and he must justify its exercise by the results which he secures. Our life may be read from an outside standpoint,

and therefore we are glad to hear the testimony of the anatomist, the physiologist, and the physician; they have a right to speak, and they have a right to be heard: our life may also be read from an internal standpoint, and therefore we are glad to hear the psychologist, the metaphysician, the theologian. Let us listen to them all. We may need all the help they can severally and jointly give us. Now Moses says, I am going to write the history of the world as a *theologian*; I deliberately and distinctly assume a theological standpoint, and my meaning you may catch from my first tone—"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." How he will conduct the discussion we cannot at this moment tell. He may have made a mistake in supposing that it can be conducted from this point at all. But in common fairness give him time. The disgrace and the shame will be his, not ours, if he fail, so the least we can do is to let him have all the scope he asks for. It does not follow because another writer proposes to give the history of creation without any reference to God that therefore he will inevitably and completely succeed. Even an atheist may be sometimes wrong! I ask fair play for both godly and godless writers; let each write his Bible, and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God!

Instead, therefore, of boggling at this first chapter of Genesis, I read it as its writer meant it to be read, and I reserve the right of critical revision after I have fully mastered what he has really written. From the intensity of his religious tone, I am bound to infer that this man is going to tell me in the simplest and directest manner all he can tell about creation, or all he thinks it needful to tell in order to get a sufficient background for the story which it is his main purpose to relate. He does not lay claim to any consideration which I need hesitate to yield. He does not say, "I am inspired, what I say is said with Divine and final authority, and you must accept it or be lost in outer darkness for ever." He says nothing about inspiration. He does not lay claim to one tittle of authority. In a plain, abrupt, urgent manner he begins his stupendous task. I am charmed with his directness. I feel that if the story had to be told at all, it is begun in the best possible manner. If the writer had beaten around the bush in laborious literary circumlocution, I should have suspected him; he would have been a mere book-maker, a clever artiste in the use of words; but he begins at once, as with a *creative fiat*, the tone being worthy of the brilliant occasion. I bespeak for him, then, a fair hearing.

Second: *This account of creation evidently admits of much elucidation and expansion.* This it has unquestionably received. Moses does not say, "I have told you everything, and if any man shall ever arise to make a note or comment upon my words, he is to be regarded as a liar and a thief." Certainly not. He gives rather a rough outline which is to be filled up as life advances. He says in effect, "This is the text; now let the commentators come with their notes." The geologist has come, and he says, "Read this word *beginning* as if it referred to incalculable time"; and there is no reason why his suggestion should not be adopted. In the next place he says, "Read this word *day* as if it meant a great number of ages"; very good, we read it exactly so, and it does us no harm. Then other men of science arise to say, "Don't suppose that the heavens and the earth were made

exactly as you see them ; they came out of a germ, an atom, a molecule," and I answer, So be it : God did not make a tottering old man exactly as we see him ; he did not make the trees and flowers exactly as we see them ; and if it is the same with the heavens and the earth, so be it. "They came partly by friction," says the scientist. Very good, I reply ; what is friction and who made it ? "Rotation had something to do with it." Possibly so, I answer ; what is rotation and who started it ? "Origin of species," whispers another. Very good, I answer ; what is origin and when did it originate ? Instead of resenting these suggestions, I am thankful for them. I put them all together, and I find the difference between Moses and his scientific commentators to be that Moses worked synthetically and they worked analytically, that is, Moses put all things together, and the sum total was God ; his opposing commentators take things all to pieces, and the sum total is a circumference without a centre. It is uncertain whether geologists contradict Moses, but it is positively certain beyond all doubt that geologists contradict one another. Still this contradiction may be the very friction out of which the light and warmth of truth will come. So that the commentators be but honest and sober-minded men, I welcome all they have to say and if they be otherwise, they will have to eat their own words, and other pain no man need wish them. This first chapter of Genesis is like an acorn, for out of it have come great forests of literature ; it must have some pith in it, and sap, and force, for verily its fertility is nothing less than a miracle.

Third : This account of creation, though leaving so much to be elucidated, is in harmony with fact in a sufficient degree to *give us confidence in the things which remain to be illustrated*. In almost every verse there is something which we know to be true as a mere matter of fact, and therefore we are prepared to believe that what is hazy may yet be shown to be full of stars as bright and large as the nearer planets which we call facts. Undoubtedly we have day and night, sea and dry land, grass and herbs and fruit-trees, and undoubtedly there is a light that rules the day, and another light that rules the night ; the waters, too, are full of moving creatures, and fowls have the liberty of the open firmament. So it was no poet's creation that Moses looked at, but the plain grand universe just as we see it and touch it. It was bold of him to think that it had a "beginning"; *that* was an original idea, very startling and most graphic. He does not say that God had a beginning ! Observe that, if you please ! How easy to have suggested that God and the universe are both eternal ! Instead of doing this (a comparatively easy thing, escaping endless questioning), he says the heavens and the earth had a beginning, and therefore have a history more or less traceable. If he had said, "God, man, and matter are all eternal, but I will take up the history of man at a given point and follow it down to recent times," he would have made easy work for himself. But he makes difficulty ! He opens the way for a thousand objections ! This is satisfactory to my mind. It is a boldness that corresponds to the valour of truth as we know it. It may be, then, that we have got hold of the right guide after all ! All I ask is that he be not interrupted until he has come to the very last word of his story.

Fourth: *There is a special grandeur in the account which is here given of the origin of man.* In the twenty-sixth verse, the tone quite changes. Even the imperative mood softens somewhat, as if in an infinitely subtle way (far out of the reach of words) man's own consent had been sought to his own creation. "Let us make man"—"make," as if little by little, a long process in the course of which man becomes a party to his own making! Nor is this suggestion so wide of the mark as might at first appear. Is man not even *now* in process of being "made"? Must not all the members of the "US" work upon him in order to complete him and give him the last touch of imperishable beauty? The Father has shaped him; the Son has redeemed him; the Spirit is now regenerating and sanctifying him; manifold ministries are now working upon him, to the end that he may "come to a PERFECT MAN, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." As it were, arbitrarily and sovereignly, the dust was shaped into human form, an upright thing that had wonderful powers and still more wonderful latent possibilities. But is not all Biblical history an appeal to this upright thing to *be* a man? Is not the Gospel of Christ the good news that he may *have* life, yea eternal life, and enter upon a destiny of immeasurable progress and ineffable felicity? What, I ask again, if man is still *in process of being made*? What if our present selves have to be shed as blossoms to make way for the fruit? In this sense the building of manhood may well take as long as the building of the rocks. It is a fearful thought, most solemn, yet most humbling, that we may be but a stratum on which other strata have to lie until the last line is laid down, and God's ideal of humanity is realised. Or take it the other and pleasanter way, which all Scripture would seem to sanction, namely, man was made a living soul, that is, every man was intended to live, and has capacities which will enable him to receive life in its largest and Divinest sense; this is, indeed, his unique and glorious characteristic, his point of infinite departure from the beasts that perish. But he can destroy himself! He can choose death rather than life. Now it is in this very choice that man is really "made." The appeal is, Will you *be* a man? Will you *have* life? Jesus Christ says, "I am come that ye might have life." Thus, as I said with apparent self-contradiction, man is asked to be a party to his own creation—to consent to be himself! "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Glorious to me is this idea (so like all we know of the Divine goodness) of asking man whether he will accept life and be like God, or whether he will choose death and darkness for ever. God does not say to man, "I will make you immortal and indestructible whether you will or not; live for ever you shall." No; he makes him capable of living; he constitutes him with a view to immortality; he urges, beseeches, implores him to work out this grand purpose, assuring him, with infinite pathos, that he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but would rather that he should LIVE. A doctrine this which in my view simplifies and glorifies human history as related in the Bible. Life and death are not set before any *beast*; but life and death are distinctly set before *man*—he can live, he was meant to live, he is besought to live; the whole scheme of Providence and redemption is arranged to help him to live—why, then, will ye die?

Gen. ii. 1-3.

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made ; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it : because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made."

ADAM, EDEN, AND EVE.

SIMPLE and honest is this as the speech of a little child ! A child tells you things in lumps and mouthfuls, and hurries on to conclusions in a manner quite its own and not despicable. But was Moses a child ? Exactly that and nothing more in book-writing. He had no forerunners to study, no models to copy, no high grammatical authorities to consult. Strange that men should be hard upon him in matters literary, when they have been so long at school and he was never at school at all !

But was he not inspired ? Certainly he was—an inspired child, or he never would have written as he did. There is a Divine grace in his style which makes men ask, Whose image and superscription is this ?

He says God *rested*. Is not that a sweet child's notion ? He knew no other term, no long-syllabled emptiness, and he thought the term just the right one for the place. So it is. It is a word that touches our sympathy and makes us rest too. I feel that I need rest after reading the first chapter of Genesis ; it is so energetic, so full, so urgent ! It is really beautiful after you have seen the foam and heard the roar of Niagara to go away into one of the quiet green spots near at hand ; we seem to rest the stunned ear. And what a cataract is this first chapter of Genesis ! How suns, and stars, and firmaments, and seas, and mighty living things move in quick and even terrible succession ! *And God rested*, says Moses. Not that God was tired, but his work was done—the last beauty glowed tenderly on the picture like a smile of contented love. If Moses had said that "The Infinite having

caused this emanation called the universe to settle into harmonic proportions," and so forth, I should have turned away from him in disgust, for it would have been the strut of the peacock, and I have no liking for that air. It is best as it is. It even brings God near to us in a kind of human sympathy : commanding, creating, setting fast the orbs and rocks ; he is far enough away from us ; but when he *rests* he seems to be close at hand and to know what our own weariness is.

And he blessed the seventh day. And long afterwards Jesus blessed the bread. The work of each was done. Jesus died before he was nailed to the Cross ; no man took his life from him ; he laid it down of himself. You remember when ? When he said in Gethsemane, " Not my will, but thine be done " ; *then* he died. The remainder was but a Jews' murder, a highwayman's conquest. God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good ; and Jesus, too, shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. Thus the *end* shall be good ; the process may be rugged and severe, but the end will be bright and tenderly calm.

" These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew : for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground (signifying man's feebleness), and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (a direct gift from God) ; and man became a living soul.

" And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden (Paradise is a Persian name for an enclosed park) ; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree (the ancients admired trees rather than landscapes) that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food ; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden (Eden means pleasure ground) to water the garden ; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison : that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold ; and the gold of that land is good : there is bdellium and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon : the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel : that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates. And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it " (4-15).

Here begins that great system of Divine and human co-operation which is still in progress. There were trees, plants, herbs, and flowers, but a gardener was wanted to get out of the earth everything that the earth could yield. By planting, and transplanting, and replanting, you may turn a coarse tree into a rare botanical specimen—you may refine it by development. So man got something for his own pains, and became a sort of secondary creator! This was almost too much for him. He began to think that he had done nearly everything himself, quite forgetting who gave him the germs, the tools, the skill, and the time. It is so easy for you junior partners in old city firms to think that the "house" would have been nowhere if you had not gone into partnership! But really and truly, odd as it may seem, there *was* a "house" before you took it up and glorified it.

What a chance had man in beginning life as a gardener! Beginning life in the open sunny air, without even a hothouse to try his temper! Surely he ought to have done something better than he did. The air was pure, the climate was bright, the soil was kindly: you had but to "tickle it with a spade and it laughed in flowers." And a river in the grounds! Woe to those who have their water far to fetch! But here in the garden is the stream, so broad that the moment it is liberated from the sacred place it divides itself into four evangelists, carrying everywhere the odours of Eden and the offer of kindly help. Surely, then, man was well housed to begin with. He did not begin life as a beggar. He farmed his own God-given land, without disease, or disability, or taxation to fret him; yet what did he make of the fruitful inheritance? Did the roots turn to poison in his mouth, and the flowers hang their heads in shame when his shadow fell on them? We shall see.

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (vv. 16, 17).

There need not, I think, be any reasonable difficulty in finding out the meaning of these trees. Make the statement historical, or make it parabolical, and it comes much to the same thing. It means that there is a permanent line separating obedience from

disobedience ; that all created life is limited ; and that whoever breaketh through a hedge a serpent shall bite him. These trees were not traps set to catch the man ; they were necessities of the case. They showed him where to stop. Wonderful, truly, that if he touched the tree of mystery he should *die* ! Yes, and it is grandly and solemnly true. It is so with life. Let life alone if you would live. Receive it as a mystery, and it will bless you ; degrade it, abuse it, and it will slay you in great wrath. It is the same with *light*. Pluck the sun, and you will be lost in darkness ; let the sun alone in his far-off ministry, and you shall never want day and summer. It is the same with *music*. Open the organ, that you may read its secret, and it will fall into silence ; touch it on the appointed keys, and it will never tire in answering your sympathetic appeals. It is so difficult to be satisfied with the little we have and the little we know. We want to see over the hedge. We long to withdraw the screen that is everywhere trembling around us. We torture these little pulses of ours to tell us what they are, and how they were set a-ticking in their warm prisons. No man ever saw his own heart ! There it is, knocking in his side, as if it wanted to come out ; but if you let it out, it can return to its work no more ! It seems to be only the skin that covers the pulse ; but, though seemingly so near, it is really so far !

"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," said the Almighty. This is not a threat. It is not a defiance or a challenge. It is a revelation ; it is a warning ! When you tell your child not to touch the fire or it will be burned, you do not threaten the child : you warn it in love, and solely for its own good. Foolish would the child be if it asked why there should be any fire ; and foolish are we, with high aggravations, when we ask why God should have set the tree of life and the tree of knowledge in Eden. These trees are in every family. Yes ; they are in every family, because they are in every heart ! How near is death ! One act, and we cease to live. This is true—physically, morally, socially : one act—one step between us and death !

"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone ; I will make him an helpmeet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air ; and brought them

unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an helpmeet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (vv. 18-25).

God has always been thinking what would be for the man's good. How, then, does God propose to meet loneliness? By making another man? Why, when he made a man to keep Cain company, Cain killed him! It would seem to be one of the deepest laws of human nature that man must kill man, and that the only chance of keeping society together is by the marvellous influence of woman. For man to be alone means suicide; for two men to be together means homicide; woman alone can keep society moving and healthful. The woman and the little child are the saviours of social order at this day all over the world. For woman to be alone is as bad as for man to be alone. Safety is in contrast, and in mutual complement.

Reverence for womanhood will save any civilisation from decay. Beautiful and very tender is this notion of throwing man into a deep sleep to take a rib from him as the starting-point of a blessed companionship. So much is always being done for us when we are in states of unconsciousness! We do not get our best blessings by our own fussiness and clever contrivance: they come we know not how. They are sweet surprises; they are born of the spirit, and are as untraceable as the veerings of the wind. This is the course of true love, and of marriages that are made in heaven. You cannot by searching, and advertising, and scheming find out a companion for the lonely soul. She will come upon you unconsciously. You will know her by a mark in the forehead which none but yourself can read. The moment you see her the soul will say, "Behold the bride!" and you, leaving your father and your mother, shall cleave unto your own wife, and you shall be one for ever. "A good wife is from the Lord." He who made the lock will also make the key. "This also

cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working."

God rested from all his work on the seventh day, and yet he had not made woman! In making her he seems to have begun again. Can Omniscience have afterthoughts! Could this deed not have been brought within the seven days? Better think of it as a deed which makes a space for itself so special as to have a separate numbering in the list; nay, as to be itself the beginning of a list, illustrious and immortal. O woman, love thy Maker! Thou art the most wonderful instrument he made in the earth; see to it that the music of thy life be all given to his holy praise.

Gen. iii. 1-5.

"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

THE WOMAN, THE SERPENT, AND THE FALL.

WHAT a vain wrangling of words there has been about this serpent talking! I pass by that altogether, and settle myself on the unquestionable fact that the woman did actually eat of the fruit and that human nature has ever since suffered from the effects of her doing so. Evidently *something* has disagreed with the world. We do not trust, love, honour, and help one another; we are selfish, mean, irascible, unforgiving; we know that our respectability is the thinnest part about us and that the faintest scratch will touch the wolf. If, when I am most conscious of this, some one should say to me, "This is the serpent's work," I should answer, "Very likely." That is how I should take it in my highest moods; the natural history difficulty would never occur to me in the holy excitement of my moral anger. The serpent itself is the best comment upon

the text. Look at it: glittering, lithe, cunning, cold, smooth, poisonous—truly, it looks as if it *might* have done it! I don't think the lion could, or the elephant, the eagle, or the ox; but the serpent brings with it a high probability of baseness and mischief. Then, again, what do you mean by talking? Is there no talking but what is done by the tongue? Men talk with their eyes, their hands, their shoulders, their attitudes—and sometimes we say, "He said as plainly as if he had spoken," when the man in question has adopted a clever posture or an eloquent action of the eye. So a single suggestion may start a long train of reasoning, and we justly charge upon that suggestion all the consequences that have flowed from it.

A clever serpent, truly, to begin using words in a double sense! That is pre-eminently a serpent-like trick. Observe how the word *die* is played upon. It is used by the serpent in the sense of dropping down dead, or violently departing out of this world; whereas the meaning, as we all know by bitter experience, is infinitely deeper. We lose our life when we lose our innocence; we are dead when we are guilty; we are in hell when we are in shame. Death does not take a long time to come upon us; it comes in the very day of our sin—"in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (vv. 6, 7).

A beautiful gate it is that opens upon ruin! It is well shaped, well painted, and the word *Welcome* illuminates it in vivid letters. We have all eaten of this tree, and we eat of it every day. A thing looks nice and therefore we take it; a sound is very pleasant and therefore we listen to it; an action promises pleasure and therefore we do it. When did ever a man do anything because it looked hard, uninviting, and severe? When did he drink much gall? or when did he eat much of the bitter aloes? His temptation does not lie in that direction, but contrariwise; it is when the tree is "pleasant to the eyes" that he rushes upon it with suicidal frenzy. Offer to him *pleasure*, and

you may lead him like a sheep to the slaughter. Now *every* appetite of man points in the direction of pleasure, and every appetite pleads to be satisfied. To satisfy it and yet control it is the supreme trial of life. It cries, Give, give; and if you give it one inch of undue liberty it will drag you down to the chambers of death.

Wonderful in its depth of meaning is this expression, "*the eyes of them both were opened*"! They saw before; no new organs of vision were created; yet they saw what they had never seen, as we ourselves have done. Temptation blinds us, guilt opens our eyes; temptation is night, guilt is morning. In guilt we see ourselves, we see our hideousness, we see our baseness: we see hell!

"*Their eyes were opened,*" and they saw that their character was gone! You can throw away a character in one act, as you throw away a stone. Can you go after it and recover it? Never! You may get something back by penitence and strife, but not the holy thing exactly as it was. A stone that is thrown along the road you may recover, but a stone thrown at night time into the sea who can get back again!

"*They sewed fig-leaves together and made themselves aprons.*" And this we have been doing ever since! We try to replace nature by art. When we have lost the garment sent from heaven we try to replace it with one woven from earth. But our deformity shows through the finest robe! The robe may be ample, brilliant, luxurious, but the cripple shows through its gorgeous folds. Ever since this fig-leaf sewing, life has become a question of clothes.

The legs of the lame are not to be made equal by the tailor. Clothes are irreligious. Clothes are liars. Clothes are letters of credit, but they are forgeries. The clever tailor is only a clever impostor, and the best-dressed man is the most successful hypocrite. Of course we blame the climate for being cold, and we say we must use the bounties of providence: yes, yes, but all this is secondary talk: primarily, clothes are the trappings of guilt.

And now let us follow the development of the story. The Lord came into the garden in the cool of the day (v. 8), and Adam and his wife hid themselves among the trees of the garden.

So there is a consistency in sin: they hid themselves from one another; hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. Sin is the only separating power. Goodness loves the light. Innocence is as a bird that follows the bidding of the sun. When your little child runs away from you, either you are an unlovely parent, or the child has been doing something wrong.

Adam was afraid of the Lord! (v. 10). Afraid of him who had made the beautiful garden, the majestic river, the sun, and the moon and the stars! How unnatural! Instead of running to the Lord, and crying mightily to him in pain and agony of soul, he shrank away into shady places and trembled in fear and shame. We do the same thing to-day. We flee from God. Having done some deed of wrong, we do not throw ourselves in utter humiliation before the Lord, crying for his mercy and promising better life: we stand behind a tree, thinking that he will pass by without seeing us. This sin makes a fool of a man as well as a criminal: it makes him ridiculous as well as guilty. It makes its own judgment day!

"And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (v. 12).

And much Adam has been blamed for so saying, yet it was the plain fact, and about as good a thing as there was to be said. It would be a mean thing *now* for a man to blame a woman, but in this case Adam was really blaming himself. Besides, we sometimes pay a compliment to the very person whom we seem to blame. Our action is this: "Can it be wrong to do what such a person told me to do? Is not the person the best apology for the deed? If I cannot believe an angel, whom am I to believe?" You say that Adam blamed the woman, but he blamed God still more, if there was really any blaming at all in the case, which is doubtful. The man cured of his blindness did not *blame* Jesus when he said—"He that put clay upon mine eyes, the same said unto me, Wash in the pool of Silmam." Besides, who are we that we should scowl upon Adam? Whatever Adam did, *we* did; Adam was not an individual only, he was the type of manhood. And even if he were not, there is not a man amongst us who would not skulk out of his guilt at the expense of the fairest woman or sweetest child that ever

breathed. "He that is without sin let him cast the first stone." A woman would do infinitely more for a man than any man would do for a woman.

Then come the penal clauses, and it is wonderful how the curse is tempered with mercy, so much so indeed that it is difficult to tell whether there is not more blessing than cursing in the sentence. The seed of the woman is to be mighty enough to crush the serpent; and the ground is to be difficult of tillage for *man's sake*. Hard agriculture is a blessing. To get harvests for nothing would be a pitiless curse indeed. To be sentenced to "hard labour" is really a blessing to great criminals; it breaks in upon the moodiness that would become despair; it taxes invention; it keeps the blood moving; it rouses energy. Many a man has been *made* by the very hardness of his task. But terrible are the words—"unto dust shalt thou return." According to these words it is plainly stated that man was to be exactly what he was before he was made at all,—he was to be dead dust, by reason of his sin. Whether any way of escape can be found out remains to be seen. The *law* is plain; whether *mercy* can modify it will be revealed as we proceed in the wondrous story. Perhaps there may yet be made a Man within a man, a Spirit within a body, a Son within a slave. That would be glorious, surely! Night has fallen upon the guilty pair, but in the night there are stars, large, bright, like tender eyes shining through the darkness,—perhaps these stars will lead on to a manger, a Child, a Saviour!

Then come words which no man can fully understand, about Adam becoming as God, and about the cherubim and the flaming sword keeping the way of the tree of life. Yet, though there be much mystery, there is also some warm light, and what there is of such light is as a glint of summer kindling upon the desolate scene. Observe, the tree of life was not cut down; nor was it withdrawn from the trees of the field,—no, the tabernacle of God was left with men upon the earth. Well was the way watched until the time should come for approach: strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, yet men may travel now up to the blessed tree and take the fruit of immortality! God has never taught us to set little store by life. He has always watched it and guarded it as with hosts of armed angels.

It is not to be wantonly plucked. It is God's choice gift. He has, too, alway kept the line very distinct between himself and his creatures,—“*the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil;*” not *really* as “one of us,” but *imaginatively* so; he thinks he now knows all that there is to be known, but this imagination must be corrected by the imposition of high discipline: he thinks he has discovered the sham and failure of things and found out the scheme of God; he must be undeceived; throw a skin upon his back, drive him out of the garden, keep the tree of life, and let him learn by long and bitter experience that there is no short road to dominion and immortality.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, though thou art unsearchable, yet in Jesus Christ we have seen the brightness of thy face. We have long sought for thee, but thou didst not come closely to us in all the works of thy hands; we said, Surely we shall find God in the light, and his face will shine upon us through the congregation of the stars; we have gone forward, but thou wast not there; backward, but we could not perceive thee; on the left hand where thou dost work but we could not behold thee; thou didst hide thyself on the right hand, so that our eye could not see thee. We heard that thy way was in the sea and thy path in the great waters, but in all the floods we did not hear the voice for which our hearts longed in sadness. We have wandered wearily through the temple of Nature, but it was a chamber in which there was no light; we have watched all the seasons, yet they have been to us only as the beautiful garments of an unknown guest. All this has often made our heart ache, and destroyed the balance of our thoughts; we have felt very lonely, and sometimes in our sorrow we have wished to die. This *morning* we glorify thee that Jesus Christ has satisfied all our hunger and thirst, and has given rest to eyes tired with long watching; thine only begotten Son, who dwelt from unbeginning time in the bosom of his Father, has risen upon us as the day-spring from on high; and our hearts are sufficed. We thank thee for his human form, because it brings him so near us; and we thank thee for his great sorrows, because their recollection often lifts us above our own griefs. Truly thou didst in Jesus Christ give us an unspeakable gift; we can sooner stretch a line upon the foundations of the earth, and comprehend the dust of the earth in a measure, than find out the length and breadth, the depth and height of thy love, which passeth understanding. Why didst thou so enrich us with all this love? Surely we had destroyed our beauty and perverted all the comeliness of thine image, and all our dignity had been thrown down into the dust and covered with shameful dishonour; yet thou didst come after us as if thy heart was troubled by our absence, and thou didst call us with a voice that was made tremulous by anxiety, so tender and overflowing

was thy love. Feeling our own poverty and littleness, we have often wondered how thou couldst love us so much ; why didst thou not throw us into a pit of forgetfulness, and call around thee the unfallen children of light, and throne thyself above their adoring praises ? Surely thou hast purposed a great destiny for us, and in ages to come we shall know somewhat of the meaning of our amazing redemption : we confine our view within the dying day and are lost in troubled wonder ; but when we lay hold of our immortality in Jesus Christ, and think of the revelations which thou hast yet in store for us, we are made strong and glad by a great hope. Amen.

Gen. iii. 17.

“Cursed is the ground for thy sake.”

THE GROUND.

YOU do not suppose, and therefore I need not waste your time in answering the delusion, that Almighty God took *revenge* upon the ground because Adam, the first man, had broken the Divine law. Yet, at first reading, it is easy to see how that mistake might be made. Adam had broken the Divine revelation, and he was now in the presence of Almighty God for the purpose of receiving sentence. In the midst of that sentence occurs the remarkable words of the text, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake.” Yet possibly there may be a tone of beneficence even in that denunciation. It was for man’s advantage in many respects that the ground should be made hard to till and cultivate, and it is to that point that I wish to direct attention.

The ground is our first lesson-book. We must follow the law of the ground. I must get you away, as far I can, from manufactures, and science, and politics, and fix your attention upon the great law of the land. The land is the true wealth of the nation. Manufactures are a flash in the pan—they succeed, they fail, they change, they die ; they go abroad, they are unsteady, vagrant, almost unreckonable—rising or falling now and then—but the stability, the wealth, the greatness of the country is the land. Where agriculture is bad, manufactures cannot advance ; where farming is poor, the jeweller cannot live. Have you fully considered the moral meaning of this, or have you lived all your time in the city and have not known that there is a great place called the country, and that London would go down if the land went down ?

Not only is the land important in that political and economical sense, but—and this is the point to which we must

speedily come—the land is *a grand lesson-book*. Study the law of land and agriculture, and let that be your first lesson in the cultivation of your own life. If you have been taking your lessons from the book of manufactures, I do not wonder at your being sometimes ill-regulated and ill-behaved. If you have been making politics your model and standard, I do not wonder at your being all twisted and gnarled and ill-conditioned wholly. You should have lived on the *land*; let us hasten to the green fields, and teeming plains, and learn what we can of God's great law of true and abiding progress.

A man does not cultivate the land to any great extent simply by *waving his hand majestically over it*. It is a curious land; you would have thought that a man with six diamond rings upon his fingers would have subdued the land and made it bring forth anything he wished it to produce, by waving majestically several diamonds across the astounded meadows. Yet that is exactly how some persons wish to live: they do not want to give a *quid pro quo*; they do not want to pay fair and square on the world's counter for what they get; they wish to throw up the window and call Fortune, and say, "Fortune, obey me; lay your gold here, and go and get more and bring it also." There are certain very grand persons who wish to live well and yet do nothing in return. That is not the law of land; that is not the first lesson that is written in the great ground-book. The land says, "If you want anything out of me you must work for it; I answer labour, I respond to industry, I reply to the importunity of toil." That is the great law of solid progress: ploughing, digging, harrowing, rolling, watering, and then the sickle and the garner. You wanted to get your living, you remember, without ever putting your coat off, and the ground will not be tilled by men who go to it with their coats on and look round, and wonder why they were called to labour.

I have also observed that *the ground does not obey the dashing and angry passion of any man*. You can go into your mill and smash your looms, you can go into your laboratories and put out your fires—but when you go into the fields how little you are! The green field does not turn white, though you curse over it till you foam again at the mouth. You cannot get usefully into a passion with old Grandame Nature. You can spur a horse, you

can goad an ox, you can lash a dog—what can you do with the old mother earth? Suppose now you should jump twenty feet into the air and come down again bang on the ground; what would happen? Nothing to the earth; if anything did happen it would happen to the foolish jumper.

This, then, is my first lesson-book. "If my horse, if my ox, if my dog, do not do as I want them to do," says the angry man, "I *make* them," and then with his blood boiling hot he goes out into the fields, and he can do *nothing*! The ground says, "If you want to do anything with me you must do it with hopeful patience; I am a school in which men learn the meaning of patient industry, patient hopefulness. I never answer the anger of a fool or the passion of a demented man. I rest." We cannot compel nature to keep pace with our impatience; man cannot hasten the wheel of the seasons; man cannot drive nature out of its calm and solemn movement; his own fields keep him at bay. He would like to get on faster, faster—it would please him to have three wheat harvests every year, it would delight him to have an orchard-stripping on the first day of every month. He makes his dog go out when he likes—his own trees put out their branches without him and mock his fury. Nature says, "I must have my long holiday"; nature says, "I must have my long, long sleep." Without recreation and rest, man's life would not be solidly and productively developed; he may be lashed and scourged and over-driven and maddened, but broad, massive, enduring growth he never can realise unless he operates upon the law of steady slowness.

Such is the great lesson of nature. We sometimes think we could improve the arrangements of Providence in this matter of the ground. A man standing in his wheat-field is apt to feel that it would be an exceedingly admirable arrangement if he could have *another crop* of wheat within the year. He thinks it could be managed: he takes up the roots out of the earth and he says, "This will never do; why, I have lost my year herein—now I will command the ground to bring forth another crop," and this agricultural Canute, having waved his hand over the fields, is answered with silence. That must be your law of progress. There is the very great temptation to hasten to be rich. I see a man in yonder corner, not half so able as I am, never had half

the education I have had, and by a lucky swing of the hand he makes ten thousand pounds, and I am labouring at my mill, or at my counter, or in my field, and am getting very little—and very slowly. I look in the other corner and see exactly such another man, and he, too, by a lucky twist of the hand, makes ten thousand a-year; and I never make one, by long, patient, steady work. I know what I will do: I'll put off this old labourer's coat, and buy a new fine one, and go and join these men and do as they do, and I will have a hundred thousand pounds in a month, and horses and carriages and estates, and I will not go at this slow snail pace any longer—why should I? I go—and I fail, as I deserve to do. Society never could be built upon the action of such men as have now been described. They may be doing nothing dishonourable, they may be acting in a very proper way, there are no laws that have not exceptions attached to them—I broadly acknowledge the honourableness of many exceptions to this law of land-like slowness of cultivation and growth, but the solid everlasting law of human life is labour, patience, expenditure, hopefulness, little to little, a step at a time, line upon line, and if you trifle with that law you will bring yourself into a state of intellectual unhealthiness, into a condition of moral exaggeration, and you will labour upon wrong principles, and reach, by rapid strides, unhappy conclusions.

Still there is a great temptation to *hasten* to be rich; to be learned, to be great, in some way or other. We are impatient with processes; we like the conjuror; and yet, young men, young citizens of London, the law of progress is steadiness, getting up early in the morning, and going at it all day, *Nil Desperandum* on the banner, and “Excelsior” the burden of the song. I know you heard of that runaway boy from your town who went out, and by some happy stroke of fortune, as he called it, made a thousand pounds, and laughed at “the whole concern,” and asked you how the “old fogies” were getting on at So-and-so. That was an exception: I do not know the value of it because there has not been time to test it, but the law, solemn, grand, sublime, Divine, is the law of agriculture, the plough, industry, patience: works *and* faith, as well as faith *and* works, and a contented hopefulness and belief that the harvest will be more plentiful than the seed-time.

Thus I see God stooping and *writing with his finger upon the*

ground, while we students stand before him in dumb amazement, wondering at the tracery of his finger, and when he erects himself and withdraws, behold the Bible he has written. "Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it until he receive the early and latter rain." That is the first verse he has written for you in the dust. Another—still he speaks, still he writes, and this is the reading thereof. "Be not deceived ; God is not mocked ; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Still he speaks and still he writes upon the verdant earth, "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly ; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." And yet again he speaks and writes with that wondrous finger, "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand : for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." See the earth inscribed with terms like these, and learn from the land how to live.

All these analogies and illustrations lead up to the great truth concerning *spiritual* cultivation, which I wish to urge upon my own mind and yours. Spiritual cultivation, like the culture of the land, *cannot be hastened*. I know that you have forcing pits and hothouses and frames made for the purpose of rapidly feeding the roots, and almost compelling the sun to do double duty upon their glass. But what are all these when gathered together compared with the hundreds and tens of hundreds of thousands of acres which make up the total area of the globe's cultivatable land ? They are as nothing. It is as if a man should imagine that because he can have a warm bath in his own room, therefore it is possible to heat the Atlantic. You must not judge by little exceptions and by small experiments—you must seek out the central quantity and the abiding law, and that is a law of slow but steady succession : holiday, rest, sleep, patience, toil, well-directed industry. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard ; consider her ways, and be wise."

So it is in spiritual cultivation—you cannot grow a character in a week. There are some long thin stalks that you can buy in a garden market for about a shilling a dozen, and you put up these, and say, "Do grow, if you please ; do get up, and do broaden yourselves and make something like a garden about

us," and the long thin stalks, spindle-shanks, look at you, and cannot be hastened, though you mock them with their leanness, and scourge them with your unruly tongue. Look at those grand old cedars and oaks and wide-spreading chestnuts. Why are they so noble? Because they are so old. They have been rocked by a hundred wintry nurses, blessed by a thousand summer visitants, and they express the result of the long processes. They have told their tale to fifty winters, caught the blessing of fifty summers, waved musically in the storm, guested the birds of the air, and all the while have been striking their roots deeper and deeper, farther and farther into the rich soil. So must it be with human character: you cannot extemporise moral greatness, it is a slow growth. Money cannot take the place of time: time is an element in the development and sublimising of character: time stands alone and cannot be compounded for by all the wealth in all the gold mines of creation.

This spiritual cultivation not only cannot be hastened, but sometimes it is *very hard*. As a general rule, indeed, it is very difficult; it is not easy to grow in grace. Some of us live too near the smoke ever to be very great trees, or even very fruitful bushes. Circumstances are heavily against us; we are not placed in favourable localities or under very gracious conditions. The house is small, the income is little, the children are many and noisy, the demands upon time and attention and patience are incessant, health is not very good and cheerful, the temperament is a little despondent and very susceptible to injurious influences, and how to grow in Christ Jesus under such circumstances as these, the Saviour himself only knows. Do not suppose, therefore, that I mock any of you, that I taunt you with your moral leanness and want of progress in your life that is in the Son of God. We do not all grow under the same sunny conditions; how some of you grow at all is one of the practical mysteries of my life—under any circumstances I feel as if I could not grow at all. Be thankful to God, therefore, that the bruised reed is not broken, that though you are faint, still you are pursuing; that though you are very weak in the limb and cannot run hard in this uphill race, your eye is fixed in the right quarter; and the fixing and sparkling of your eye has a meaning which God's heart knows well.

Cheer thee, then ! Though growth is not so broad and obvious as thou wouldst like it to be, yet God is Judge : to whom little is given, from him shall little be expected. I do not look for such flowers in the poor man's little painted flower box, set upon his one-paned window-sill, as I look for in the great man's ample grounds in which is called into exercise the highest horticultural ability of the day. Yet—and, blessed be God, this is the supreme proof—yet nothing is lost that is meant in the way of moral growth and progress. Weary not in well-doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not. There are some things beyond your control. Shall I meet a farmer coming out of his well-tended fields with a few lean ears of corn as his only harvest, and mock him because he is not bringing in a thousand golden-headed sheaves ? I know the labour he has expended, I know the sleepless nights he has had—more or less foolishly it may have been, but still he passed them ; I know his labour and anxiety, and when he says to me, "This is all the result," do I encounter him with taunting and mockery ? God forbid ! So when I see some of you come out of your long moral labours, your many prayers and tears, your strong and urgent desires to be better men, and you say, "Look here, this is what we are, not worth looking at, so mean, so ill-favoured, so blighted"—am I the man, as Christ's minister, to laugh at you and mock you ? I ask about the labour you have expended, and God rewards the diligence, God has regard to the spirit, God knows what we mean ; he interprets the set and stress of the will, and if we would have built a temple for him, though we have not laid one stone upon another in its real erection, he takes the purpose of the honest heart as the execution of the industrious hand, and writes in his book that we have built temples to his name.

What is true in the land, and in attainments, is true, with infinite extension of meaning, in the spiritual realm. I want to preach like some dear old father in God, whose words are light, whose sentences are music, and I cannot until twenty more years have come and gone, and mellowed me into richer ripeness. I want to sing like some voice that makes the air melodious, and I cannot unless I practise hour after hour, every day, and obey the discipline of the severest and yet gentlest teachers. I want

to be massive, noble in all truthfulness, and brilliant in all moral splendour, and I cannot be until long time has elapsed. The path of the just is not a flashing blaze that comes and goes, it is as the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day. Walk by the same rule, mind the same thing, persevere, go on, "never stand still, till the Master appear." Be this your purpose, and God will do the rest!

Gen. iv. 2.

"And Abel was a keeper of sheep."

EARLY FAMILY LIFE.

THIS chapter begins the family register of the world, and begins it, in truth, very awkwardly. Eve said that she had gotten a man from the Lord, but the man soon showed that the contrary supposition would have been sustained by a higher probability, for it would seem from Cain's spirit and conduct that the Lord had next to nothing to do with him. He took quietly, however, to his father's trade, and the three of them lived a dull, narrow life in some place now undiscoverable. A dull life, truly. The old people disgraced, the young man nothing to hear but how his father and mother had misbehaved themselves, and had been made to start the world with a skin a-piece and a rude knowledge of gardening. No newspaper, no telegraph, no politics, no theatres, no public-houses: why, some of you young men think your lives dull enough, but at any rate you can hear the noise, if you cannot join in the glee, and it is something after all to be able to hear a good loud noise: it scares the ghosts off and sets you wondering. Cain had nobody of his own age to speak to. He lived under the cloud of an unhappy memory, and day by day he got moodier and gloomier in temper.

When Abel was born his mother did not say *he* was from the Lord. She kept a silence full of meaning upon that point. Her experience of Cain's odd ways and fierce looks had led her to take Abel's coming very quietly, for if the one had led her such a life, what would two of them do? So Abel came almost without a welcome, and Adam set him in due time to a new

business, for no more gardeners were wanted just then. You know what became of Abel ; Cain killed him, as many elder sons are trying to kill their younger brothers to-day. Those who have been some time in possession do not like to be disturbed. Elder sons begrudge their wooden horses and their other toys to their baby brothers now-a-days, and pinch those baby brothers and grin at them unlovingly on the sly ; even in *your* nursery, my friend, though you think your little ones are angels. The late comers have a hard time often, for there is an unwritten law of primogeniture and an unwritten law of knuckles. Your Cain has bitten your Abel many a time when you were not looking, and has been grimly glad when the unlucky baby has had his fingers jammed in the nursery door.

Cain was not without a kind of religiousness, remember. He did go to the unroofed church sometimes, but he went so unwillingly, so slouchingly, so coldly, that it was no church to him : he begrudged the few roots and fruits that he took, just as we begrudge the weekly offering, and therefore God let him take them home, just as we would do if we could get secretly at the box. God takes nothing from our unwilling hand. He loves a cheerful giver ! He will take two mites, he will take a cup of cold water, he will take a box of ointment, if given gladly ; but none of your grudging, none of your dropping a penny as if it were a half-crown, none of your grunting, none of your porcupinishness ; all must be free, glad, honest, open, and joyous ; then the fire will come down and take back to heaven the gift of your love.

Abel was religious in the right way. He gave the best he had with an open heart, and the Lord said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." Now, observe, if you please, for it will help you through your whole life, that brothers are not necessarily akin. The greatest contrasts I have perhaps ever known have been, between brothers. Yes, and they have been utter strangers to one another, have been these very brothers. And if you think of it, the thing is reasonable enough : the human family in all its bearings is *one* ; human nature is not incoherent, but consolidated. We live in flats, and think that one flat has no connection with another ; that is our foolish and ruinous mistake. Your brother may be on the next continent ; your mate-heart may be a stranger you have never seen. Cain and Abel were not akin.

Cain did things with his hand ; Abel did them with his heart : Cain flung his gifts at you, and if you did not catch them so much the more pleased was he ; Abel gave them with a hearty love, and was sorry he had not more to give. So Cain killed Abel, and will kill him to the end of the world, spite of all preachers and moralists, but now in a cunning enough way to escape the gaoler and the gibbet. But he will kill him ! The man who lost the prize for which his essay was written will kill the man whose essay was accepted ; he will sneer at him, and a sneer may be murder. The man who lost the election, being "defeated, not disgraced," will kill the man who got in ; he will shrug a shoulder when his name is up, and a shrug may be homicide ! You and I may have killed a good many people, and a good many people may have tried to kill us ; they will take away our trade, they will say unkind things of us, they will close an eye or pucker a lip villainously, and then dry their mouths as those who have been drinking in secret. It is very horrible ; it smells sulphurously ; hell cannot be far away, and we are not to windward.

Some people are very curious to know what these sacrifices were, and grey-headed commentators, who ought to have known better, have spent no end of time in trying to gratify their idle curiosity. Some have thought that the virtue was in the thing taken, as if *that* could be ! No ; you must find out what the *heart* is, what the motive is, what the will is. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." It is for ever true that God abhors the sacrifice where not the heart is found. If you want to find out Cain's condition of heart you will find it after the service which he pretended to render ; you know a man best *out* of church ; the minister sees the best side of a man, the lawyer the worst, and the physician the real. If you want to know what a man's religious worship is worth, see him *out* of church. Cain killed his brother when church was over, and that is the exact measure of Cain's piety. And so, when you went home the other day you charged five shillings for a three-shilling article, and told the buyer it was too cheap : and that is exactly the value of your psalm-singing and sermon-hearing. You said you enjoyed the discourse exceedingly last Thursday ; then you filled up the income-tax paper falsely : and you will be judged by the

schedule, not by the sentiment. Do not trouble your heads about the details of the first sacrifice, but remember that what is required of us is that we do justice, love, mercy, and walk humbly with God. If thou doest well thou shalt be accepted, and if not sin lieth at the door.

Cain killed Abel and then said he did not know where he was, and pettishly he asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" How sins go in clusters! Murder, lying, selfishness, all found together in this incident. But blood makes itself heard; you cannot wash out the deep stain. All human blood is precious; there is not a drop too much of it in all the earth. It is a fountain that rises close by the throne of God. Slay a child, and the law of civilisation will seize you and kill you with a holy sword. "He that sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed." This is not a question of capital punishment in the vulgar sense of the term, but of capital punishment in its high and eternal necessity. Capital punishment, in our sense of the term, was not inflicted upon Cain, but in the fullest and deepest sense his life was forfeited to the inexorable and righteous law. Capital punishment is the doom of all sin. "The wages of sin is death." "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." To do evil is to perish at the core.

As we proceed in the chapter we find that family life extends rapidly. What length of time elapses you see we cannot tell. The spaces may have been what some people like to call "geological periods." I fancy that the true explanation of all these difficulties about the rise of the human race from two people, and all these intermarriages, is to be found in the question of *time*. But I know nothing about it, and the people called "the commentators" know nothing about it; the solid fact with which we have to deal is that the human race is *here*, and the account given of it in the Bible is the best account of it yet found in all the world. How wonderfully things begin to take shape in the following verses:—

"And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle. And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-cain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron: and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah" (vv. 20-22).

Heretofore we have had rural and pastoral life, now we advance to manufacture and art. Man is awakening, and he demands more than he has yet had; "it is the divinity that stirs within him." Jabal developed cattle and got men to live in tents, having a taste for architecture and order; Jubal made musical instruments, as harps and organs; Tubal-cain wrought in brass and iron. A grand thing it is for a man to see that his trade is from God! The organ-builder is quite as much the creation of God as the sermon-builder. Your spinning and weaving and compounding, are all from heaven. "We are fellow-workers with God." The Divine meaning is that this earth and all belonging to it shall be developed to the highest possible point. And he who helps in that direction is called of heaven to the work. Build your organs for God; keep your shops for God; employ your men and your money for God: "whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Towards the end of the chapter Lamech seems to go out of his head.

"And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold" (vv. 23, 24).

Thus Lamech seems to become the father of all such as are crazy. I cannot tell what he saith. Is it a riddle? Is it a mania? Does he think he has killed somebody? Or is it nothing but frenzy and incoherence? Truly Lamech has a large family to answer for. It is amazing how many incoherent people there are in the world. I believe it is a matter of fact that the most of men are lunatics. Not upon all points; not openly and visibly; not far enough gone to be confined in asylums; but really insane on some vital questions. How else account for their lives? How else explain the discrepancy between their creed and conduct? How else give a reason for their going straight down to hell in the very face of the Cross and against the stress of the whole love of God? "The whole head is sick," that is the terrible and sufficient answer!

Gen. iv. 13.

"And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear."

CAIN'S PUNISHMENT.

MY object is to show, so far as I may be able, some of the necessary *consequences* of sin, and to point out how those consequences prove the terribleness of wrong-doing. Sometimes we know a thing better by its consequences than by its essence. I think this is particularly the case with *sin*. It may require great intellectual power to see sin *as* sin, but the consequences of sin show themselves in glaring and appalling clearness to the dullest eyes. If, then, any man would really know the sinfulness of sin let him study its effects upon himself, and look at its consequences within the circle with which he is most familiar.

Have you ever noticed the effect of a wicked *thought* in its swift passage through the brain? I have—alas, too often!—in my own case. I have been in high intellectual health one moment, and in the next I have been thrown down as by an invisible bolt of fire; that invisible bolt was a wicked *thought*; an idea that flashed through the mind and was never known to any but God. I had suffered great loss. The brain was stunned, and for the moment it lost the fine delicate power of moving with ease through difficult questions and high speculations. Its most exquisite threads had lost their tension, and its bloom mouldered and perished. You cannot explain this fully to any one who has not felt it. But you who have felt loss of memory, a sensation of dizziness, and painful uncertainty in mental exercises; you who have turned giddy where once you stood like a rock, and have stammered where once you spoke with determined emphasis; *you* know what I mean by the sad effects of melancholy thought upon intellectual completeness and power; and in that desolating hour you may have said with infinite bitterness—"My punishment is more than I can bear."

But sin is moral rather than intellectual, and its moral consequences may be considered as more marked and terrible than the intellectual results. This is actually the case. Sin lures a man to his destruction. It eats out his soul piece by piece. If there is such a thing as a moral nerve it softens, crumples, wastes,

kills it, and then it gets the whole man into its unholy and cruel dominion.

Take a lie, and trace what may be called its natural history. First of all, the man must lie to *himself*; note that fact carefully, if you please. In getting his own consent to the lie, the man told the lie to himself. In that moment he impoverished his vitality, and prepared himself to go the next step, and when he went the next step he became so weak that he could be driven to any length on the road of wickedness. Thus he exposed himself to a new attack—he came within the humbling and shattering influence of *fear*. “The righteous are bold as a lion”; but loss of righteousness is loss of boldness. Here, then, is an intolerable punishment. The scourge of *fear* is always lacerating the bad man. Beckon him, and his knees knock together by reason of false alarm. Turn suddenly upon him, and he feels a sword cutting through his very heart. He flees, “when no man pursueth,” and a great shadow lies coldly across his merriest feast. This is punishment. It is a punishment that never ceases. When the wicked man goes to rest his pillow is too hard for his throbbing head. If he fall into troubled slumber, an unexpected tap at his door will be to him as an earthquake, or as a call to sudden judgment. And he never gets the better of this. Indeed, he gets worse and worse, until his own shadow frightens him, and his own voice seems to be calling for his detection and punishment. His punishment is greater than he can bear; its reality is great, but its imagination is infinite! Hell, in its most terrible and revolting aspect, becomes simply the natural and proper end of sin. If we could think ourselves back into a state of innocence, it would probably be impossible to us to create, even imaginatively, the idea of hell. It would not come within the region or range of our thinking. It would be like something that required an *additional sense* to apprehend or lay hold of it. But let that innocence be lost—let the soul stray from its sacred sanctuary—let it lose its hold upon God—and instantly hell opens, and hell is felt to be the proper end of sin. The sinner creates his own hell.

Cain said, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” We sometimes say that punishment should be proportioned to sin. There is a sense in which that is most true and just. It is most

true and just with regard to all punishment that comes from the outside. It is a law which must be obeyed by the parent, the magistrate, and every wronged or offended man. But this is by no means the limit of the question. *The punishment which a man inflicts upon himself* is infinitely severer than any punishment that can be inflicted upon him. "A wounded spirit who can bear?" You remember how you ill-treated that poor child now dead; you saw the anguish of his soul, and he besought you and you would not hear; and now a great distress is come upon you, and your bread is very bitter. Who is punishing you? Not the magistrate. Who then? *You are punishing yourself.* You cannot forgive yourself. The child touches you at every corner, speaks to you in every dream, moans in every cold wind, and lays its thin pale hand upon you in the hour of riot and excitement. You see that ill-used child everywhere; a shadow on the fair horizon, a background to the face of every other child, a ghastly contrast to everything lovely and fair. Time cannot quench the fire. Events cannot throw into dim distance this tragic fact. It surrounds you, mocks you, defies you, and under its pressure you know the meaning of the words, which no mere grammarian can understand—"The wicked shall go away into EVERLASTING punishment."

All this will come the more vividly before us if we remember that a man who has done wrong has not only to *be* forgiven, he has to *forgive himself*. That is the insuperable difficulty. He feels that any external view of his sin, which even the acutest man can take, is altogether partial and incomplete; and, consequently, that any forgiveness which such a man can offer is also imperfect and superficial. And even in relation to God the same difficulty arises, notwithstanding the completeness of his view as the necessity of his omniscience. To have grieved a Being so good, so holy, as God, is felt to be a crime that *ought not* to be forgiven, and that his mercy can only be extended at the expense of his righteousness. But to this we must return presently.

Have you ever watched the deteriorating effects of sin even upon the *personal appearance*? Take a youth of extreme beauty, and let him, little by little, be led into wicked practices; in proportion as he is so led will the register of his descent be

written upon his face, and upon his whole attitude and manner. Quite imperceptibly, I admit, but with awful exactness and depth. The eye, once so clear and so steady in its look, will be marked by suspicion, uncertainty, or timidity of movement; its glances will not be like sun rays darting through thick foliage, but rather like a dark lantern turned on skilfully to see what is happening here and there, but throwing no light on the man who holds it. And strange lines will be woven around the mouth; and the lips, so well-cut, so guileless and generous, will be tortured into ugliness and sensual enlargement; and the voice, once so sweet, so ringing, the very music of a character unstained and fearless, will contract some mocking tones, and give itself up to a rude laughter, partly deceitful and partly defiant. All this will not happen in one day. Herein is the subtlety of evil. If you do not see the youth for years you may be shocked when you miss the fine simplicity and noble bearing which you associated with his name. This is part of the man's punishment. It is the spot of leprosy on a forehead once so open and unwrinkled, and it will grow and spread and deepen until there be no place fit for him but the silent and inhospitable wilderness.

This punishment, too, seems to get into a man's business and house. It lowers the high discipline which once ruled and ennobled them, and substitutes trickery and eye-service for the better law which once prevailed. Everywhere it touches and debases the sinner; to his very walk it imparts a swagger or a slouch, significant of debased character, and every relation of life it perverts, disennobles, and defiles.

Now a meditation of this kind might well drive us to despair, if there be nothing else to be said. Sin can only aggravate itself and relieve our torment by plunging into some still deeper excess. Where, then, is hope to be found? If there is any way of escape, let us have it pointed out so clearly that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.

I have said that even God's forgiveness, strictly in itself, does not meet the case of a man being unable to forgive himself. That is so, philosophically, but, thank God, not evangelically. God's forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord, is not *mere* forgiveness, however abundant and emphatic. It is not merely a royal or even paternal edict. It is an act incomplete in itself; it

is merely introductory or preparatory, as the uprooting of weeds is preliminary to a better use of the soil. It is an *essential* act, for in the absence of pardon the soul is absolutely without the *life* that can lay hold of any of the higher blessings or gifts of God. To what, then, is forgiveness preparatory? To adoption, to communion with God, to absorption into the Divine nature, to the witness of the Holy Ghost. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God." And if in moments of special trial "our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things." You will see, then, that if it was merely an act of forgiveness, it would be quite true that man would be unable to forgive himself; but it is "assurance," it is "sonship," it is joy of the Holy Ghost. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation, to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." "To be spiritually minded is life and peace." "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." "It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?" Thus the soul is flooded with joy. Its daily song is of victory. It is stirred, and ruled, and gladdened by a mysterious and indestructible sense of triumph, for the grace of the blessed and infinite Christ fills the whole heart with sweet content and immortal hope.

Gen. v. 1.

"This is the book of the generations of Adam."

NOBODYISM.

THIS fifth chapter of the book of Genesis is the beginning of that long series of chapters in human history which are extremely uninteresting. What do we know about Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, and Jared? We know nothing and we care nothing, for they left no memorial behind them that shows their quality or excites our interest. You must have already noticed that this chapter is as true as any chapter in human history, especially as it shows so clearly, what we ourselves have found out, that most people are extremely uninteresting. They are names and nothing more. They are producers and consumers,

tenants and tax-payers, and that is all ; they are without wit, music, piquancy, enterprise, or keenness of sympathy. They listen to your best anecdotes and say 'm ; they hear of Livingstone with a shudder ; they suppose there must be a great noise at Niagara. Such people were Seth and Enos, Mahalaleel and Jared ; respectable, quiet, plodding ; said "good-night" to one another regularly, and remarked briefly upon the weather, and died. Just what many nowadays seem to do. Put down on paper everything that has passed between you and some people, and you will find how very little paper is needed. Now I want to show you that such people are often unjustly estimated, and to remind you that if all stars were of the same size the sky would look very odd, much like a vast chessboard with circles instead of squares. I want to remind you also that really the best part of human history is never written at all. Family life, patient service, quiet endurance, the training of children, the resistance of temptation, these things are never mentioned by the historian. The man who burns down an abbey or a minster is immortalised in history ; the poor house-wife who makes a pound go as far as thirty shillings, and pinches herself that she may give her boy a quarter's more schooling, is not known even to have lived. Guy Fawkes is known all over the world, but your honest father, who has given you a good example and a good training, is hardly known six doors away from his own residence. If we remember these things we shall mitigate the contempt with which we are apt to speak of so-called nobodies. Because we admire brilliance we need not despise usefulness. When your little child is ill, he needs kindness more than genius, and it will be of small service to him if his mother is good at epigrams, but bad at wringing out a wet cloth for his burning brow. I am, then, quite willing to admit that Seth and Enos, Mahalaleel and Jared are not one-thousandth part so well known by name as the man in the moor, but I believe they did more real good than that famous character ever attempted.

You should remember, too, that a long flat road may be leading up to a great mountain. There are some very plain and uninteresting miles out of Geneva, but every one of them brings you nearer Mont Blanc. Now from Seth to Jared is a long run through quiet domestic scenery, through daily ploughing, daily

milking, and daily gleaning ; very quiet, very simple, no noise in the dull farmhouse louder than the clock tick (excuse the modern allusion), and no noise greater than the flap of wings in the high green trees. Oh, so dull that long road from Seth to Jared, but round the corner you find ENOCH, the Mont Blanc of his day ! Many a child who never heard the name of Jared knows well the name of Enoch. So you do not know to what high hill your life may be quietly leading up. Even if you yourself are nobody your son may be a man of renown, or his son may be a valiant and mighty man. Three flat miles between Geneva and Chamounix said they would lie there no longer, so many travellers had called them dull and tame, so they went off in a huff, nobody knows where ; but Mont Blanc himself bowed his crowned head and remonstrated, owning that but for them he himself would hardly have been known one mile away from home. So the three peevish miles came back again, proud to be a roadway to the monarch of hills. You know Enoch, but you know nothing of Jared ; you know Moses well, but how many men amongst you can tell me his father's name ?

It would seem that in Enoch we come to the first really good man, of any fame, in Biblical history. I do not except Abel. In fact what we know of Abel is next to nothing. Enoch reaches the point of renown in godliness ; he walked with God three hundred years at least ; his walk was on the high hills, so high that he simply stepped into the next world without troubling Death to go through his long dark process. "He was not, for God took——." As if he had walked so near that God opened the window and took him in ; and we, too, might pass in as easily if we walked on the same sunny heights. But we are in valleys and pits, and God must needs send death to dig us out and send us to heaven by a longer road. Solemn indeed is the word, "Enoch walked with God" ; it means so much ; there was a serenity about the man unlike all other quietness ; a tender light made his face shine, and in his voice there was a tone, rich, pensive, joyous, altogether wonderful in its combination of humility and triumph. To walk with God is to pray without ceasing ; to walk with God is to be absolutely free from care and independent of human judgment ; to walk with God is to be in heaven.

After Enoch we come to Methuselah. He, too, is well-known,

although for nothing but length of days apparently, yet as a matter of fact he ought to be known for something much more highly distinguished. It is wonderful how oddly and whimsically fame is gained : Methuselah is famed because he was the oldest man, and Samson because he was the strongest man ; another is known because he can walk upon a tight rope, and another because he can swim across a channel. If it were in my power to preach the most splendid sermon ever uttered by mortal lips not a newspaper in the world would take the slightest notice of it, but if I put up an umbrella in the pulpit or tore the pulpit Bible in two many a paragraph would report the eccentricity. A splendid sermon would be thought of as interesting only to the few, but an act of folly would be regarded as of universal interest. Thus it is (though it may not seem so) that things get into history. Any man living can have a world-wide notoriety to-morrow, can have his name telegraphed throughout the whole range of civilisation, and be the subject of editorial comment throughout Christendom. Shoot any member of the royal family, and see if this be not so. Everybody knows that Methuselah lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years, but nobody knows that but for you two orphan boys would never have had a chance in life. No preacher has a really world-wide name, known in slums and garrets, backwoods, steamboats, thoroughfares, and palaces, who did not in some way get it through "contemptible speech."

Now what is that other thing for which Methuselah ought to be better known than for his great age ? Tell me without looking at your Bibles. I give you a moment for recollection. Now tell me ; you cannot ! I knew you could not ! *He was the grandfather of Noah* ; that is his glory, not his mere age ! You cannot tell what your boy may be, or his boy : so keep yourself up to the mark in all mental health and moral integrity lest you transmit a plague to posterity. It may be that Nature is only resting in you ; presently she will produce a man !

Methuselah was the father of Lamech, and Lamech was the father of Noah. Here we come once more upon the highlands of history and the air grows keener. Though Lamech had many sons and daughters, yet his hope glowed most brightly when he looked upon Noah. Truly "there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." A father

of such insight deserved a son of such renown. He did not know the full meaning of his own words, and therein he was like the rest of us; for oftentimes upon our small words God puts meanings which our hearts had never conceived, as out of one grain of corn he brings a return of sixty-fold.

Precisely the same thing we have in this chapter we find in the catalogue of the names of the early disciples of our Lord. We know Peter and James and John. But how little as compared with them do we know of Thomas and Bartholomew and Philip, of Lebbaeus, and Simon the Canaanite. Yet they were all members of one company, and servants of the same Lord. We speak of men of renown, forgetting that their renown is principally derived from men who have no renown themselves! Unknown people make other people known. The hills rest upon the plain ground. Besides, there is a bad repute as well as a fair fame: Judas Iscariot is known as widely as the Apostle John! Be not envious of those who have high place and name; could we know them better perhaps we should find that they long for the quietness of home and sigh for release from the noise and strain of popular applause. Happily, too, we should remember that a deed may be immortal, when the mere name of the doer may be lost in uncertainty. Such deeds are mentioned in the Bible; they are told everywhere as imperishable memorials, though the names of the doers have escaped the attention of the busiest watchers.

So closes this apparently uninteresting chapter. Let me say that the hour will be dark in which we pine for things romantic at the expense of a quiet and deep life. Christianity teaches us that no child is to be despised, no work is to be considered mean, and that suffering may have all the honour of service. Woe to us when we can live only on stimulants! When the house is accounted dull, when only sensational books can be endured, when music and drama and painted show are essential to our happiness, life has gone down to a low ebb and death is at the door. Let us do our quiet work as if we were preparing for kings, and watch attentively at the door, for the next comer may be the Lord himself

Gen. vi. 13.

"And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me ; for the earth is filled with violence through them : and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth."

NOAH'S FLOOD.

THIS is exactly the tone of the creative chapters of the Bible. It is important to remember this, as showing that God's sovereignty has two distinct but consistent operations,—it creates, and it destroys, and the creature may not say, What doest thou ? It is important, too, to remember that no middle point is proposed between creation and destruction ; and as the one is taken literally, so the other must be taken in its plain and obvious meaning : when God "creates," he gives existence ; when God "destroys," he takes existence away. It is in this view that I regard the narrative upon the consideration of which we are now entering as singularly important—viz., as showing the Divine sovereignty in creation and destruction. Let us look at the narrative and see what we can of God's method, that we may see how he ripens and executes his severest purposes.

It is happily clear that God is moved by what we would call moral considerations, and not by arbitrary impulse, in his government of mankind. The man who does an action simply to please himself is said to act arbitrarily ; the action is not founded upon argument or reason, and is therefore arbitrary. In this case God gives his reasons, and discloses every step in the process of his pathetic and mournful argument. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." That is the basis of action. God's purpose in creating man had been frustrated ; its frustration involved the ruin of man, as if by a suicidal act. God, therefore, seeing that ruin *must* come, acted judicially, as in the first instance he had acted creatively. The question would seem to have been simply this : "Shall sin be left to kill the human race slowly, as if inch by inch, without my asserting judicial rights, or shall I distinctly interpose, as I did in Eden, and bring judgment down upon iniquity ?" We ourselves would say, with all humility and reverence, that God was bound to take the second course, if he

was to protect not only his own dignity, but the integrity of truth and righteousness. In this act we have on a large scale what in Eden we had on a small scale—a determination on the part of God to *destroy evil*; and by destroying evil I do not mean locking it up by itself in a moral prison, which shall be enlarged through ages and generations until it shall become the abode of countless millions of rebels, but its utter, final, everlasting extinction, so that at last the universe shall be “without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing”—the pure home of a pure creation.

But what is the meaning of there being no middle point between creation and destruction? Does it mean that there is no effort on the part of God to save man? It means nothing of the kind. God has never ceased to make this effort until he himself has proved the hopelessness of making it. In this very narrative the law of his working is most clearly defined: “My spirit shall not always strive with man.” Many curious interpretations have been given of these words, but none, to my mind, so satisfactory as the one which is most obvious. It may be expressed thus: Man shall not die without remonstrance; I will plead with him; I will ply him with every consideration that can move his conscience and his heart; and not until hope is utterly extinguished will I release him from the importunity of my love. Thus, man is not coldly allowed to die: he is besought, importuned, urged; and by his own uncontrollable madness alone does he rush upon everlasting destruction.

In this chapter we see Divine forbearance exhausted. A very tender expression is here employed: “It grieved the Lord at his heart that he had made man on the earth.” The apostle says, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.” By putting the two expressions together, we see the wonderful unity of the Bible history and of human nature in all ages. We raise many curious questions about Divine providence, but there is one which ought to arrest our attention, perhaps more gravely than any other—Why did God create a creature that had the power to grieve him? It is because out of such power there comes the ability to worship and to serve God, and out of worship and service there comes a blessed progress in all purity and nobleness of life.

The Almighty is about to do here what some of us in our

imperfect wisdom have often wished to see done : we have supposed that if all notoriously bad people could be removed at a stroke from the world the kingdom of heaven would be at once established on the earth. The idea may be put roughly thus : Bring together all prisoners, all idlers, drunkards, thieves, liars, and every known form of criminal ; take them out into the middle of the Atlantic and sink them there, and at once society will be regenerated, and paradise will be regained. Now this is substantially the very course which the Almighty took in the days of Noah, with what results we know only too well. All our fine theories have been tested, and they come to nothing. The tree of manhood has been cut down to the very root, and it has been shown in every possible way that the root itself must be cured if the branches are to become strong and fruitful. If you were to-day to destroy all the world, with the single exception of one household, and that household the most pious and honourable that ever lived, in less than half a century we should see all the bad characteristics returning. Water cannot drown sin. Fire cannot burn out sin. Prisons cannot cure theft and cruelty. We must go deeper.

In the meantime it was well to try some rough experiments, merely for the sake of showing that they were not worth trying. If the Flood had not been tried there are some reformers amongst us who would have thought of that as a lucky idea, and wondered that it had never occurred to the Divine mind ! After all, it is a very elementary idea. It is the very first idea that would occur to a healthy mind : the world is a failure, man is a criminal and a fool, sin is rampant in the land ; very well ; that being the case, *drown the world*. There are persons who seriously ask, Do you think the Flood ever did occur ? and there are others who find shells on hill-tops and show them in proof of a universal deluge. O fools and slow of heart ! This Flood is occurring every day ; this judgment upon sin never ceases ; this protection of a righteous seed is an eternal fact ! How long shall we live in the mere letter and have only a history instead of a revelation,—a memorandum book instead of a living Father ? That there was a flood exactly as is described in the Bible I have not so much as a shadow of a doubt ; but even if I took it as an allegory, or a typical judgment given in parable, I should seize

the account as one that is far more profoundly true than any mere fact could ever be. Look at it! God morally angry, righteousness asserted, sin judged, goodness preserved, evil destroyed,—it *is* true; it *must* be true; every honest heart demands that it be taken as true.

As we have a moral reason for the destruction of the earth, so we have a moral reason for the preservation of Noah. Observe this closely, so as to escape the idea that there is anything capricious or whimsical in the Divine government—"Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (ver. 9). Of his great-grandfather, Enoch, the same testimony was borne,—“he walked with God.” This man who so walked was spared. The judgments of God are not mere violences; they keep their course by a law at once merciful and terrible: they spare the good, they overpass the house sprinkled with blood, they throw down no holy altar. How calmly those judgments come! They seem indeed to come suddenly, but they really come up from eternity: slowly, surely, irresistibly! It is something to be able to challenge the severest inquiry into the moral reason of this solemn transaction,—something to be able to say that, in all the severity of his judgments, God never mingles the righteous and the wicked in one indiscriminating punishment.

What a rain it was! “All the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, and th rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights”; still the torrents came, and the great cataracts, so that men knew not the dry land from the sea; “and the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth”; they rose to the high windows, and the billows dashed upon the drenched roofs like angry seas; and men fled away to the mountains and watched the cruel pursuer from afar; and still it rose, obliterating their footsteps, and rising quickly like one impelled by mighty anger to seek the prey; the wolf, the lion, the leopard stood upon the crags, bay-ing and roaring with fury that drove them mad, and high above the surging deep there screamed the affrighted eagle and the vulture, enraged by hunger: at last there was but one hill top left, and there the strongest and fiercest of the sons of men gathered, and there were heard prayers, and oaths, and curses, and cries

that made the wild beasts quiet ; and still the cold waters rose, the lightning at midnight showed the dreary waste on which no stars glittered, and amid thunders that shook the universe the last strong man plunged into the infinite gulf ! “ And all flesh died that moved upon the earth ; all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died.” Oh, what a rain it was ! What an outlook from the window of the ark ! For many a long day no eye could venture to look out of that window ; for who could bear to see the grey-haired man, and the fair woman, and the little child doomed to die ! Who can steadfastly look upon the judgments of God, or bear the flash of his uplifted sword ? “ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

“ The waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days.” Then came the time of release. “ God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged.” At the end of forty days after, the tops of the mountains were seen ; Noah opened the window of the ark and sent forth a raven ; then he sent forth a dove, but the dove returned ; a week after he sent out the dove again, and the dove returned in the evening with “ an olive leaf pluckt off.” In another week he sent forth the dove once more, and the dove came not again. And soon after the ark was broken up, and “ Noah builded an altar unto the Lord, and the Lord smelled a sweet savour ” ; and thus a new beginning was made. We seem now to have a new Adam and a new Eve. How they will turn out remains to be seen. They have a great advantage over the original pair, for they have a solemn history behind them. They can never forget the surge that beat and dashed furiously against the ark ; never can they forget that last lightning that flashed past the window, like an angel of destruction, and seemed to shake a sword threateningly in their own faces ; never can these things be forgotten ! Noah will do better than Adam, and make us grieve that the experiment of humanity was not begun with this noble and incorruptible man ! We shall see.

MAKING, DESTROYING, AND SAVING MAN.

"And God said, Let us make man."—GEN. i. 26.

"And the Lord said, I will destroy man."—GEN. vi. 7.

"Will he reserve his anger for ever?"—JER. iii. 5.

"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."—LUKE xix. 10.

IF you could bring together into one view all the words of God expressive of his purposes concerning man, you would be struck with the changefulness which seems to hold his mind in continual uncertainty. He will destroy, yet the blow never falls; he will listen to man no more, yet he speeds to him in the day of trouble and fear; he will make an utter end, yet he saves Noah from the flood, and plucks Lot as a brand from the fire; his arm is stretched out, yet it is withdrawn in tender pity. So changeful is he who changeth not, and so fickle he in whom there is no shadow of turning! We cannot but be interested in the study of so remarkable a fact, for surely there must be some explanation of changefulness in Omniscience and variation of feeling in the Inhabitant of eternity. You never read of God being disappointed with the sun, or grieved by the irregularity of the stars. He never darkens the morning light with a frown, nor does he ever complain of any other of the work of his hands than man, made in his own image and likeness! he does indeed say that he will destroy "both man and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air," but it is wholly on account of man's sin; for, as everything was made for man, so when man falls all that was made for him and centred in him goes down in the great collapse. Why should there be blithe bird-music in the house of death? Why should the earth grow flowers when the chief beauty has lost its bloom? So all must die in man. When he falls he shakes down the house that was built for him. So we come again to the solemn but tender mystery of God's changefulness, and ask in wonder, yet in hope, whether there can be found any point at which are reconciled the Changeable and the Everlasting?

But let us be sure that we are not mistaken in the terms of the case. Is it true that there is any change in God? is not the apparent change in him the reflection of the real change that is in

ourselves? I not only undertake to affirm that such is the case, but I go farther, and affirm that the very everlastingness of the Divine nature compels exactly such changes as are recorded in the Bible. If you say that man ought not to have been created as a changeable being, then you say in other words that man ought not to have been created at all. If you find fault with man's constitution, you find fault with God, and if you find fault with God I have no argument with you. I take man as he is, and I want to show that Divine love must manifest itself, either in complacency or anger, according to the conduct of mankind.

I must remind you that this principle is already in operation in those institutions which we value most, and that it is a principle on which we rely for the good order, the permanent security, and the progress of society.

This principle is in constant operation in family life. By the gracious necessities of nature the child is tenderly beloved. The whole household is made to give way to the child's weakness. The parents live their lives over again in the life of the child. For his sake hardship is undergone and difficulty is overcome. The tenderest care is not too dainty, the most persistent patience is not accounted a weariness. But sin comes: ingratitude, rebellion, defiance; family order is trampled on, family peace is violated; and in proportion as the parent is just, honourable, true, and loving, will he be grieved with great grief; he will not be petulant, irritable, or spiteful, but a solemn and bitter grief will weigh down his desolated heart. Then he may mourn the child's birth, and say, with breaking and most tearful voice, "It had been better that the child had not been born." Then still higher aggravation comes. Something is done which must be visited with anger, or the parent must lose all regard for truth and for the child himself. Now, all punishment for wrong-doing is a point on the line which terminates in death. Consider that well, if you please. It may, indeed, be so accepted as to lead to reformation and better life; but that does not alter the nature of punishment itself. Punishment simply and strictly as punishment is the beginning of death. Have you, then, changed in your parental love because you have punished your child? Certainly not. The change is not in you; it is in the child. If you had forbore to punish, then you would have lost your

own moral vitality, and would have become a partaker in the very sin which you affected to deplore. If you are right-minded, you will feel that destruction is better than sinfulness ; that sinfulness, as such, demands destruction ; and if you knew the full scope of your own act you would know that the very first stripe given for sin is the beginning of death. But I remember the time when you caressed that child and fondled it as if it was your better life , you petted the child, you laid it on the softest down, you sang it your sweetest lullabies, you lived in its smiles ; and now I see you, rod in hand, standing over the child in anger ! Have you changed ? Are you fickle, pitiless, tyrannical ? You know you are not. It is love that expostulates ; it is love that strikes. If that child were to blame you for your changefulness you would know what reply to make. Your answer would be strong in self-defence, because strong in justice and honour.

We have exactly the same thing in the larger family called *Society*. When a man is punished by society, it is not a proof that society is fickle in temper ; it is rather a proof that society is so far conservative, and even everlasting in its substance, as to demand the punishment of every offender. Society is formed to protect and consolidate all that is good and useful in its own multitudinous elements, yet society will not hesitate to slay a man with the public sword, if marks of human blood are upon his hands. Is, then, society vengeful, malignant, or uneven in temper ? On the contrary, it is the under-lying *Everlasting* which necessitates all those outward and temporary changes which are so often mistaken as signs of fickleness and uncertainty. What the Everlasting cannot tolerate is dishonour, tyranny, wrong, or impureness in any degree. Society offers rewards to-day and deals out punishments to-morrow. At noon, society may crown you as a benefactor ; at midnight, society may drag you forth as a felon : the same society—not fickle or coy, but self-protecting and eternal in righteousness.

These side-lights may at least mitigate the gloom of the mystery with which we started. I want to make you feel that God's changefulness, so called, is not arbitrary, but moral ; that is to say, he does not change merely for the sake of changing, but for reasons which arise out of that very Everlastingness which seems to be impaired ! Not to be angry with sin is to connive at

it; to connive at sin is sinful; to be sinful is to be no longer Divine. When God is angry it is a moral fire that is burning in him; it is love in a glow of justice; it is his protest on behalf of those who may yet be saved from sin.

See how it is God himself that saves man! We trembled when he said he would destroy man, for we knew he had the power; and now that he says he will save man we know that his power of offering terms of salvation is none the less. If man *can* be saved, God will save him; but it is for the man himself to say whether he will be saved. "If any man open the door, I will come in to him." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." This is the voice that said, "I will destroy," and the two tones are morally harmonious. Looking at the sin, God must destroy; looking at any possibility of recovery, God must save. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench." Christ lives to save. He would no longer be Christ if human salvation were not his uppermost thought. His soul is in travail; he yearns over us with pity more than all human pitifulness; he draws near unto our cities and weeps over them. But he can slay! He can smite with his strong arm! His hand can lay hold on justice, and then solemn is the bitter end! O, my soul, make thy peace with God through Christ. It is his love that burns into wrath. He does not want to slay thee; he pities thee; he loves thee; his soul goes out after thee in great desires of love; but if thou wilt not come to his Cross, his arm will be heavy upon thee!

How true, then, is it that there is an important sense in which God is to us exactly what we are to him! "If any man love me, I will manifest myself to him." That is the great law of manifestation. Have I a clear vision of God? Then am I looking steadily at him with a heart that longs to be pure. Can I not see him? Then some secret sin may be holding a veil before my eyes. *I* have changed, not God. When I seek him he will be found of me; but if I desire him not he will be a God afar off!

Gen. ix. 13.

"I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth."

THE NEW BEGINNING.

THIS second beginning was in many respects very different from the first: there is nothing here about a garden, or a forbidden tree, or a tempting serpent. So it would appear from the letter of the narrative; yet, lo, as we go along the courses of the history, we find that they are every one here, only under different names, yet ending in precisely identical effects! So much for variety in human history! Believe me, there is no vital variety; it is all superficial and apparent, not profound and real.

A beautiful sight was the altar which Noah built upon the re-appearing earth. Beautiful to think that there was a Church before there was a house! If you look at that first new building in the new world you will see it expand until it becomes a sanctuary wide as the earth, and all men are gathered in loving piety within its ample walls. Sweet was the savour that rose from earth to heaven! And as the smoke curled upward to the approving sky the primeval blessing was repronounced; the seasons were confirmed in their revolutions; and all things seemed to begin again in unclouded hope. Was there, then, a new human nature, and did God succeed better in his second experiment than in his first? No. The serpent is still here! Listen: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." The first temptation was from without, the second was from *within*. This is the verdict of history. In the first account we read that man was made in the image and likeness of God; and in the second we read that the imagination of his heart is evil from his youth. This, then, must be the accepted fact, and all Divine interpositions must be based upon it. The first thing we learn after this solemn declaration is that there is to be no more smiting of every living thing, plainly showing that mere destruction is a failure. I do not say that destruction is undeserved or unrighteous, but that it is, as a reformative arrangement, a failure as regards the salvation of survivors. We can see men slain for doing wrong, and can in a day or two after the event do the very things which cost them their lives! It might be thought that one

such flood as this would have kept the world in order for ever, whereas men now doubt whether there ever was such a flood, and repeat all the sins of which the age of Noah was guilty. You would think that to see a man hanged would put an end to ruffianism for ever; whereas, history goes to show that within the very shadow of the gallows men hatch the most detestable and alarming crimes. Set it down as a fact that punishment, though necessary even in its severest forms, can never regenerate the heart of man. From this point, then, we have to deal with a history, the fundamental fact of which is that all the actors are as bad as they can possibly be. "There is none righteous, no not one." "There is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not."

It is remarkable, however, that though God will not any more smite every living thing, he has surrounded human life with the most solemn sanctions: "And surely your blood of your lives [your life-blood] will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man." Under the old dispensation if an ox gored a man it was to be killed. The sovereignty of human life is with God, and secondarily with whomsoever he may appoint. This arrangement follows the account of the flood with remarkable propriety, because when human life has been destroyed on a large scale the value of it might seem to be worthless. Why quibble about the morality of killing one man when ten thousand have been swallowed up in a flood? But God says in effect—Every human life is of great value; every man must set great store by his own life; and every man must consider himself in a high degree responsible for the life of his brother,—“Of every man's brother will I require the life of man.” Thus, too, he would seem to correct the notion which the destructiveness of this flood might seem to justify, viz., that he himself is careless as to the value and destiny of human life. His answer to this must be found in his Providence and his Redemption. If any man would know what value is set on man by his Maker let him study the life, the sacrifice, and the intercession of Jesus Christ.

You will probably ask whether capital punishment is not enjoined as the law of States in ver. 6: "Whoso sheddeth man's

blood by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made he man." Wherever in civilised countries there is capital crime there must be capital punishment. But capital punishment may mean other and more than the signification usually attached to the expression. To shut a man up in life-long confinement is capital punishment. To imprison him for the whole term of his natural life is in reality to shed his blood. The mere manner of doing it is a trifle; the solemn and tragical fact is that the murderer is seized and held for ever by the strong and righteous arm of the law. *That* is capital punishment, and conscience and reason conspire to proclaim it *just*.

These solemn directions having been given about human life, a covenant, remarkable for beauty and tenderness, is established by the Almighty.

"And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood, neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

"And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth."

The covenant is that there shall not be any more a flood to destroy the earth, and the token of the covenant is the bow in the cloud. But was there not a rainbow before there was a flood? Of course there was. You do not suppose that the rainbow was made on purpose? There were rainbows, it may be, thousands of ages before man was created, certainly from the time that the sun and the rain first knew each other. But old forms may be put to new uses. Physical objects may be clothed with moral meanings. The stars in heaven and the sand by the

seashore may come to be unto Abraham as a family register. One day common bread may be turned into sacramental food, and ordinary wine may become as the blood of atonement ! The rainbow which was once nothing but a thing of evanescent beauty, created by the sun and the rain, henceforward became the token of a covenant and was sacred as a revelation from heaven. When you lived in a rich English county the song of the lark was nothing to you, it was so familiar ; you had heard the dinning trill of a hundred larks in the morning air : but when you went out to the far-away colony, and for years did not hear the voice of a single home bird, you suddenly caught the note of a lark just brought to the land, and the tears of boyhood streamed down your cheeks as you listened to the little messenger from home. To hear it was like hearing a gospel. From that day the lark was to you as the token of a covenant !

In speaking to Noah, God did not then create the bow ; he turned it into the sign of a holy bond. The fear is that we may have the bond and not the oath. We may see physical causes producing physical effects, and yet may see no moral significations passing through the common scenery of earth and sky. Cultivate the spirit of moral interpretation if you would be wise and restful : then the rainbow will keep away the flood ; the fowls of the air will save you from anxiety ; and the lilies of the field will give you an assurance of tender care. Why, everything is yours ! The daisy you trod upon just now was telling you that if God so clothe the grass of the field he will much more clothe the child that bears his own image.

Very beautiful is this idea of God giving us something to look at, in order to keep our faith steady. He knows that we need pictures, and rests, and voices, and signs, and these he has well supplied. We might have forgotten the *word*, but we cannot fail to see the *bow* ; every child sees it, and exclaims at the sight with glad surprise. If any one would tell the child the sweet meaning of the bow, it might move his soul to a still higher ecstasy ! And so with all other things God has given us as signs and tokens : the sacred Book, the water of baptism, the bread and wine, the quiet Sabbath, the house of prayer ;—all these have deeper meanings than are written in their names ; search for those meanings, keep them, and you will be rich.

And now, you say, all will be well. The spared family will be as a Church of God. Noah will walk before the Lord with a reverent heart, and, like his great-grandfather, Enoch, will go up to heaven as the morning dew goes up to the sun. Alas! it is not so. "Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: and he drank of the wine, and was drunken." You cry "Shame," and go out and do exactly the same thing! You said that if you were spared in a certain affliction you would be a good man ever after: you were spared, and there is not a meaner soul on the earth at this moment. You said that if a certain calamity could be averted, you would walk before God with an honest heart: it was averted, and you have never prayed since! Then be careful not to blame Noah, for the severity which injures him slays us. Herein is God more merciful than man, for man would have said, "The bond is broken, and the bow is no longer a pledge"; yet God spared the drunkard, and kept the bow as a token in the cloud. Let us say that "his mercy endureth for ever." Let the house of Aaron say so, and the house that is our own, yea, let everything that hath breath, say, "his mercy endureth for ever."

Gen. x. 1-5:

"Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood. The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras. And the sons of Gomer; Ashkenaz, and Riphath, and Togarmah. And the sons of Javan; Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations."

THE FOUNTAINS OF HISTORY.

SHALL I be far wrong if I suppose that few of you have ever read the tenth chapter of Genesis right through? Certainly, from a glance at the long, hard names, one would think that there is not much here for the edification of the reader, and that the best thing that can be done is to skip the chapter. Yet there are some home-words here, and hidden under rough husks are some germs, out of which perhaps we ourselves may have come!

In the fifth verse you find the word "GENTILES." Pause at that word. It may be like the writing outside a letter which is meant for your reading! There is also the word "ISLES." No Englishman can pass that word lightly over. He himself is an islander, the sea-fog dims his windows and the sea boom wakes the gruff bass of all his songs. Perhaps the Hebrew writer had his prophetic eye upon these very shores of ours, so sea-worn and bleak. There is also the word "FAMILIES." Surely we know that word well; we live at home; we have made poetry sing "The Old Arm-chair," "My Ain Fireside," and "The Children's Hour." The poorest Englishman tells you what "family" he belongs to, though he slept in the gutter last night, and pawned his coat for a shilling, which he spent in gin. So you see even here, in this chapter which seems to be all Hebrew and meant only for a Jew's eye, we pick out odd words that are plain good old English, the very freehold and charter of our own people.

Thus conciliated I think an Englishman might now stand at the point of view occupied by the writer of the tenth chapter of Genesis, from which he sees the going forth of the descendants of the sons of Noah, by whom "were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands, every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations." A wonderful going forth, truly; having in it the germ of every civilisation, the outline of every tragedy, the promise of final redemption and glory. To us the chapter is full of difficult reading, because full of strange, hard names that mean nothing to our memory or our love. Who are Gomer and Magog, and who are Sabtah and Dedan? Is there any home-music in Ashkenaz, or is any heart-chord touched by Cush and Mizraim? Yet learned ethnologists have seen wonderful things in this tenth chapter of Genesis. They have seen the descendants of Gomer seeking for themselves a dwelling in the confines of Asia and Europe, making an irruption into Asia Minor, disappearing in Asia, and coming up long ages after in the Cimbri, and as the founders of the great Celtic race. From Javan they have seen arising, in wondrous beauty, chaste and strong, the whole Hellenic people. Tubal and Meshech have been followed into the Cappadocians and the Iberians; so that even in those few names we begin to see the peopling of Northern Europe, the land of Greece, and the region between the Euxine and the

Caspian. From Tiras will come the Thracian stock, and collaterally the Goths and the Teutons; and the ethnologist pauses at Ashkenaz, for in that root he thinks he finds the Scandinavian and the Saxon. So if we say, standing beside this great Hebrew cemetery, Can these dry bones live? the breath of the Lord is blown upon them, and behold they start up and claim even ourselves here and there as their own kindred, according to the flesh. And as for God, "is HE the God of the Jews only? is HE not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also."

A clear conception of the import of this marvellous chapter should enlarge and correct our notions in so far as they have been narrowed and perverted by our insular position. We should recognise in all the nations of the earth one common human nature. "God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth." This reflection is both humbling and elevating. It is humbling to think that the cannibal is a relative of ours; that the slave crouching in an African wood is bone of our bone; and that the meanest scum of all the earth started from the same foundation as ourselves! On the other hand, it is elevating to think that all kings and mighty men, all soldiers renowned in song, all heroes canonised in history, the wise, the strong, the good, are our elder brothers and immortal friends. If we limit our life to families, clans, and sects, we shall miss the genius of human history, and all its ennobling influences. Better join the common lot. Take it just as it is. Our ancestors have been robbers and oppressors, deliverers and saviours, mean and noble, cowardly and heroic; some hanged, some crowned, some beggars, some kings; take it so, for the earth is one, and humanity is one, and there is only one God over all blessed for evermore!

If we take this idea aright we shall get a clear notion of what are called home and foreign missions. What are foreign missions? Where are they? I do not find the word in the Bible. Where does home end; where does foreign begin? It is possible for a man to immure himself so completely as practically to forget that there is anybody beyond his own front gate; we soon grow narrow, we soon become mean; it is easy for us to return to the dust from whence we come. It is here that Christianity redeems

us ; not from sin only, but from all narrowness, meanness, and littleness of conception ; it puts great thoughts into our hearts and bold words into our mouths, and leads us out from our village prisons to behold and to care for all nations of mankind. On this ground alone Christianity is the best educator in the world. It will not allow the soul to be mean. It forces the heart to be noble and hopeful. It says, "Go and teach all nations"; "Go ye into all the world"; "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"; "Give and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, heaped up, and running over." It is something for a nation to have a voice so Divine ever stirring its will and mingling with its counsels. It is like a sea breeze blowing over a sickly land ; like sunlight piercing the fogs of a long dark night. Truly we have here a standard by which we may judge ourselves. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." If we have narrow sympathies, mean ideas, paltry conceptions, we are not scholars in the school of Christ. Let us bring no reproach upon Christ by our exclusiveness. Let us beware of the bigotry of patriotism, as well as of the bigotry of religion. We are citizens of the world : we are more than the taxpayers of a parish.

A right view of this procession of the nations will show us something of the richness and graciousness of Christ's nature. What a man must he have been either in madness or in Divinity who supposed that there was something in himself which all these people needed ! The disciples asked what were five loaves amongst five thousand people, and truly we may magnify their amazement, as we ask, What is one man amongst all the nations of mankind ? Truly Christ is bold when he says to his Church, Go ye into all the world. Has he considered the difficulties of travelling ? how hard a thing it is to go a thousand miles from home, up hill and over sea ? Has he considered the difficulties of language—one set of peoples writing from right to left, another from left to right, another knowing nothing about grammar and literature—one speaking nothing but monosyllables, another speaking hardly anything but polysyllables—one language a rhythmic stream, another something between a grunt and a growl ? Has he considered the expense of the undertaking ? Men cannot travel for nothing. Men cannot live upon nothing. Men cannot

support their families upon nothing. Yet Christ said, Go ; go everywhere ; go at once, and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Christ is undoubtedly to be credited with bold and daring conceptions. He had no material rewards for his messengers. He sent them away with the least possible allowance of personal comfort ; no portmanteaus, no wardrobes, no retinue ; he said, Go after all these people and tell them that I only am their Saviour and Lord. Never man spake like this man !

ON THE BUILDING OF BABEL.

Gen. xi.

COMPARING this account with our own method of life and art, it is clear that from the beginning of time men have been doing pretty much the same thing all the world over. The world's story is but short ; it is very much like a series of repetitions : the actors, indeed, have been innumerable, but the drama has always been contracted, and seldom profound. The actors have made noise enough, but when there has been a little break through the dust, we have observed that they have not always made equal progress. We have a short Bible, because we have a short life. We have a fragmentary Bible, because we have a fragmentary human story. We have a Bible that apparently contradicts itself, because we have a life full of discrepancies—because part of us is Divine and part of us earthly—because we have many chipped links, many unmatched and unmatchable patterns, which no skill can put into anything like decent unity. The world, too, is but a little world. Men jump together again and again as if they could not escape one another's presence, and as for thinking, strife of mind, intellectual projections and conceptions, originalities there are none ; *variations* many, but no *originalities*. We are still in the land of Shinar, plotting with one another, burning bricks, building cities and towers, and being thrown from depth to depth of confusion. We are shut up in a very small prison, and can see but little through the narrow grating of our separate cells. What can we do, then ? What is our calling ? It is to try to alter the *moral tone* of our work ; we must burn bricks, build cities, and erect towers in *the right spirit* ;

and we must try to get to heaven, not as the builders of Babel did. If we get to heaven at all, it will never be through the dark and rickety staircases of our own invention. Let us, then, read the story of Babel together, and gather from it what we may.

“And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.”

Unanimity is nothing, considered strictly in itself. It is of no value that we say, in excuse of this or that deed, “It was done unanimously.” Men may do wrong things unanimously, as well as things that are right. We must distinguish between union and conspiracy; we must distinguish between identity and mere association for a given object. Twelve directors may be of one language and of one speech, but the meaning of their unity may be self-enrichment, at the expense of unsuspecting men, who have put their little all into their keeping and direction. It is nothing, therefore, to talk about unanimity in itself considered. We must, in all these things, put the moral question, “What is the unanimity about?”—“Is this unanimity moving in the right direction?” If it be in a wrong direction, then unanimity is an aggravation of sin; if it be in a right direction, then union is power, and one-heartedness is triumph. But it is possible that unanimity may be but another word for stagnation. There are words in our language which are greatly misunderstood—and unanimity is one of them; peace is another. When many persons say peace, what do they mean? A living, intelligent, active co-operation, where there is mutual concession, where there is courtesy on every hand, where there is independent conviction, and yet noble concert in life? Not at all. They say that a Church is unanimous, and a Church is at peace, when a correct interpreter would say it was the unanimity of the grave, the peace of death. So I put in a word here of caution and of explanation: “The whole earth was of one language, and of one speech”; here is a point of unanimity, and yet there is a *unanimous movement in a wrong direction*.

“And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly; . . . and they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven.”

There are times in life when lucky ideas strike men; when there is a kind of intellectual spring-tide in their nature, when men

rise and say, "I have got it! Go to, this is it!" And in the bright hours when such ideas strike one, the temptation is to be a little contemptuous in reference to dull men who are never visited by conceptions, so bright and original as we deem them. A man has been in great perplexity, month after month, and suddenly he says, "Go to, the solution is now before me; I see my way right out of this dark place"; and he heightens his tone, as the joy swells in his heart. That is right. We could not do without intellectual birthdays; we could not always be carrying about a dead, leaden brain, that never sees light or shouts victory. We like these moments of inspiration to break in upon the dull monotony of such a lifetime as ours. So it is perfectly right that men should express their new conceptions—their new programme—and lay out a bold policy in a clear and confident tone. But are all our ideas so very bright? When we see our way to brick-making, is it always in the right direction? When we set our mind upon founding a city and building a tower the top of which shall rest against the stars, *is it right?* You see that question of "right" comes in again and again, and in proportion as a man wishes to live a truly Divine life he will always say, before going to his brick-making and his city-founding and his tower-building, "Now, *is this right?*" Many of us could have built great towers, only we knew that we should be building downwards if we had set our hands to such work as has often tempted us. Do not let us look coldly upon apparently unsuccessful men, and say, "*Look at us; we have built a great city and tower; and you, where are you?—stretching in the dust and grovelling in nothing.*" They could have built quite as large a tower as ours; they could have been quite as far up in the clouds as we are, only we had perhaps less conscience than they had. When we saw a way to burning bricks, we *burned* them; and a way to establishing towers, we founded them; and they, poor creatures, unsuccessful men, began to *pray* about it, and to wonder if it was right, and to ask casuistical questions, and to rack themselves upon conscience; and so they have done no building! And yet they *may* have built. Who can tell? All buildings are not made of brick; all men do not require to lay hot brickfields, and burn clay, in order to build. It may be found one day, when the final inspection takes place, that the man who has built nothing *visible* has really

built a palace for the residence of God. It may be found, too, that some successful people have nothing but bricks—nothing but bricks, bricks, bricks! Then it will be seen who the true builders were. What I pause here to say is this: We may have bright ideas, we may have (to us) new conceptions; there are, to our thinking, original ways of doing things; now and again cunning plans of overcoming difficulties strike us. Do I condemn this intellectual activity? No; I simply say, Let your *intellect* and your *conscience* go together; do not be onesided men; do not be living altogether out of the head, be living out of your moral nature as well; and if it be right, then build the tower with all industry and determination. Let it be strong and lofty, and God shall come down upon your work and glorify it, and claim it as his own.

“A tower, whose top may reach unto heaven.”

Bold men,—men of vigorous mind, striking out something that is very definite, and about which there could be no mistake. We, too, are doing just what they did; we are following the god *Ambition*—the restless god, *Ambition*, who never sleeps, never pauses, never gives his devotees vacation, but is always stirring them up to more and more furious desires. Do I condemn ambition?—nothing of the kind. I praise ambition; I say to every young man who may to-day accept me as his teacher, Be ambitious; build loftily; let your aspirations be confined only by the limits which God himself has set to human power and human capability; *but,—but,—*that old question comes in again, Is it right? *Is it right?* Our ambitions may be our temptations; our ambitions may be stumbling-blocks over which we fall into outer darkness; our ambitions may be the cups out of which we drink some deadly intoxicant, poisoning the mind and destroying the heart's life. Therefore, I pause again to ask, *Is it right?* Then, too, we pronounce some men ambitious, who are really not ambitious. All men do not understand the word *ambition*—ambition has been vulgarised, taken out altogether from its refined and beautiful associations, and debased into something that is intensely of the earth, earthy. I call men to *intellectual* ambition; to *spiritual* ambition; to the ambition which says, “I count not myself to have attained; this one thing I do, I *press*.” Alas! there are ten thousand men in our city streets to-day who are

"pressing"; but the question is, "Towards *what* do they press?" The apostle says, "I press towards the mark for the prize of my high calling of God in Christ Jesus." That is better than saying, "Let us build a tower whose top may reach unto heaven"; and yet it is true tower-building—it is palace-building. Men who look at things only by their senses, who value things only according to their market prices, may say, "These are castles in the air"; but I have a strong conviction that these castles in the air are in many cases the only true and enduring castles. We cannot *see* them, but what do we *see* anywhere but the shell of things, or the little pedestal? The great universe is beyond the veil; the great splendours are hidden from us; the great realities are things *not seen*. Do not let us, then, look from our lofty scaffolding down upon praying people, and thinking people, and spiritual people, and say they are not building. Our scaffolding is a long way up. Take care lest the winds catch it, and spare not! Take care lest our elevation become our destruction!

"And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded."

You believe in inspection, do you not? You say that inspection is of little worth, except it be conducted by competent power and with strict impartiality of spirit; and you are right in so thinking. In the case before us, Almighty God himself came down to see what the children of men were doing, and when he comes down (a phrase which is used to accommodate himself to our methods of expression), nothing can escape the penetration of his eye. He looks at our day-books, ledgers, and other memorandum books, to see how we are building the tower of our life; he visits our country residences and palatial buildings for the purpose of trying their foundations; he looks into all the building of our fortune, that he may see whether our gains have been honestly secured. Terrible is the day for the bad man on which Almighty God lays his great hand—the hand in which the winds are hidden, the great palm in which all the stars of the heaven are gathered—upon the tower which is being built; he will shake it, and, if the foundation is bad, the whole superstructure will be thrown down to the dust! In passing through our city streets I observe that the windows of many mercantile houses are left without defence, except huge iron bars; and it is easy to see that merchantmen

have left their letters and papers upon their desks that they might return to them on the following day and continue their business. Their places are vacant and silent, yet there is in them nothing less than the presence of God himself; and the Eye of Omniscience is passing over page after page and book after book; thus God notes the whole process and tendency of men's lives. When men build their towers under the conviction that every stone of them will be tried by Divine power—when they build their cities, and erect their towers, and extend their properties, under the assurance that not one thing of all the things that their hands are doing will escape the test of God's Spirit—we may expect life to be built upon a true foundation, and according to a righteous plan. What we have to ponder is this most certain fact, that God will come down to see our work, and that there is no possibility of concealing from him any incorrectness of plan or any deficiency of service. For many a long day we may imagine ourselves secure from the supervision of Omnipotence; but such imagination is an utter mistake, for there is nothing in our life that is not naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Our little works and our great works alike ought to be conducted with an eye to the Divine judgment. The work that is internal, as well as the work that is external, should be conducted with that holy desire to do what is right, which alone is the guarantee that we are not living atheistic lives.

“Now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do.”

Here we are brought face to face with the great question of the discipline of human imagination. Life that is lived entirely in the imagination is lived wastefully. We are not to condemn imagination, for most truly imagination is a Divine gift; but it is a gift which is seldom, if ever, to be exercised alone. Our imagination must take counsel of our judgment, and our judgment must act in co-operation with our heart, so that there may be unanimity in all our faculties in carrying out the great objects of life. It is a terrible thing for any man to be given over to the unrestrained dominion of his fancy. Our imagination becomes intoxicated, and we are the victims of dreamings which may lead us into the wildest excesses, causing us to overlook all

social claims and all Divine obligations, and to work only for our own aggrandisement and strength. Imagination never thinks; it only dreams. Imagination never reasons; it flies away, not knowing whither it is going. Imagination is never sober; it is always intoxicated with burning desire. I might challenge some of you to-day, to tell me whether you are not living lives of riotous imagination; dreaming of new plans of securing wealth, of novel projects for the defrauding of unsuspecting men, and whether in this awful excitement you are not forgetting the common duties of life. Men cannot always live upon the wings of their imagination; they must stand still, pause, think, reason, pray; and then, if their imagination can assist them to overcome difficulties, they are at liberty to follow all the will of their fancy. Let us take our starting-point from simple truth; let us hold deep and solemn consultation with the Spirit of Righteousness; let us know that our greatest power is little more than weakness; and then we shall walk without stumbling; and though our tower be not built very loftily, it will be built with a stability which God himself will never allow to be shaken.

“Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.”

This brings before us a hint of the unknown resources of God, in the matter of punishing those who disobey his will. Who could have thought of this method of scattering the builders of the city? God does not send a fire upon the builders; no terrible plague poisons the air; yet in an instant each workman is at a loss to understand the other, and each considers all the rest as but raving maniacs! Imagine the bewildering and painful scene! Men who have been working by each other’s side, days and weeks, are instantly conscious of inability to understand one another’s speech! New sounds, new accents, new words, but not a ray of intelligence in all! “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God.” God has innumerable ways of showing his displeasure at human folly and human crime. A man may be pursuing a course of prosperity, in which he is ignoring all that is moral and Divine, and men may be regarding him as the very model of success; yet, in an instant, Almighty God may blow upon his brain, and the unsuccessful man may sit down in a defeat which can never be reversed. God is not confined to one

method of punishment. He touches a man's bones, and they melt ! he breathes upon a man's brain, and henceforth he is not able to think. He comes in at night-time, and shakes the foundations of man's most trusted towers, and in the morning there is nought but a heap of ruins. He disorganises men's memories, and in an instant they confuse all the recollection of their lifetime. He touches man's tongue, and the fluent speaker becomes a stammerer. He breaks the staff in twain, and he who was relying upon it is thrown down in utter helplessness. We know but little of what God means when he says, "Heaven"; that word gives us but a dim hint of the infinite light, and blessedness, and triumph which are in reserve for the good. We have but a poor conception of what God means when he says, "Hell"; that word is but a flickering spark compared with the infinite distress, the endless ruin and torment which must befall every man who defies his Maker.

Speaking of this confusion of language, may I not be permitted to inquire whether even in our own English tongue there is not to-day very serious confusion ? Do men really mean words to be accepted in their plain common-sense ? Does not the acute man often tell his untrained client what he intends to do in language which has double meanings ? Do we not sometimes utter the words that have one meaning to the world and another meaning to our own hearts ? Yea does not always mean yea, nor does nay always mean nay ; men sign papers with mental reservations ; men utter words in their common meaning, and to themselves they interpret these words with secret significations. The same words do not mean the same thing under all circumstances, and as spoken by different speakers. When a poor man says "rich," he means one thing ; when a millionaire says "rich," he means something very different. Let us consider that there is morality even in the use of language. Let no man consider himself at liberty to trifle with the meaning of words. Language is the medium of intercourse between man and man, and on the interpretation of words great results depend. It behoves us, therefore, who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ, so to speak as to leave ourselves without the painful reflection of having taken refuge in ambiguous expressions for the sake of saving ourselves from unpleasant results. It will be a sign that

God is really with us as a nation, when a pure language is restored unto us—when man can trust the word of man, and depend with entire confidence upon the honour of his neighbour.

What shall we carry away from this meditation? Man must work; but he may work in a wrong spirit and with a wrong intent. We may do the right thing in a wrong way. What we have to beware of is *atheistic* building! "He builds too low who builds beneath the skies." "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid": "Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." The word of warning to every man is this, "Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon." A building may be noble in design, ample in magnitude, commodious and convenient in all its appointments, but the one great question relates to the foundation! Of what value is it that we build loftily and broadly, with an eye to all that is beautiful in proportion, and satisfactory in arrangement, if all the while we are building upon the sand? The fires will come, or the floods will descend, or the great winds will conspire to try our work, and though our work itself suffer loss, we shall be saved if we be resting upon the right foundation which God himself has laid. I have spoken especially of ambition. I have not dissuaded young men from being ambitious; I have rather sought to stimulate them to greater desires and more comprehensive plans. At the same time, I wish to caution them against ambition that is *atheistic*. You hear of men being the architects of their own fortunes; and there is a sense in which that expression conveys sentiments that are truly laudable. I wish, however, to alter the phraseology; henceforth let us consider God as the Architect of our fortunes, and ourselves but the builders working under his direction. Do not let us seek to be both architect and builder. "In all thy ways acknowledge God, and he will direct thy paths." We shall never be relieved from the discipline of work; the great trials of service will constantly be allotted to us; the one thing to be assured of is, that we are moving along the designs which God himself has set before us, and then, how stormy soever may be the days in which we labour, and how many soever the difficulties with which we have to contend, the building shall surely be completed, even to the putting on of the top-stone.

Do I immediately speak to any poor crushed man, whose tower during the recent commercial panics has been thrown down to the dust? But a short time ago you had a good social position, you lived in comfort, if not in luxury, your name was a watchword of confidence among men of honour; but to-day you are surrounded by the ruins of your fortune, and your children are almost reduced to beggary. Let us speak about such matters with all tenderness, yet without shrinking from the moral aspects of life. How was your tower built? Did you build it atheistically? Did you live entirely in the realm of your imagination, losing all self-restraint, and plunging into the most riotous excesses of speculation? If so, the explanation of the throwing down of your tower is not far to seek. On the other hand, if you were building honestly, and have been victimised by evil-minded men, it will one day be shown to you that the destruction of your tower has been ordered by Almighty God, and so sanctified as to bring into your heart a stronger faith, a tenderer love, and a more enduring patience. Do not say that all is lost simply because all is thrown down. The foundation abideth for ever; continue to build upon that, and be assured of the final reward. I do not know but that panics are sent of God himself, often directly, for the chastening and purification of man. Uninterrupted prosperity might prove itself to be the direst affliction which could befall society. Do we know what plagues might be engendered by the continuous shining of a cloudless sun? The high winds which try men's buildings, and often throw them down, are sent for the cleansing of the air.

Do I speak to any who have but little standing-place in the world,—to men who have never built a city or a tower? Let me say to such, "In my Father's house are many mansions"! We ourselves may not have built anything that deserves the name of a city or a tower, but Jesus Christ has gone away to prepare a place for us, and we who to-day are the children of want, having hardly where to lay our head, shall be called into a city of glory. The poor Christian has no reason to be discouraged so far as the great future is concerned; to-day there is little about him that men may call attractive; to-day he is the child of want, but insomuch as he is in Jesus Christ

he holds a title to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

Let us now go out again into the world from hearing the word of the Lord; let us resume our building, and in doing so let us invoke the presence and the guidance of Infinite Wisdom through all the processes of our life. Our business is not to build quickly, but to build upon a right foundation and in a right spirit. Life is more than a mere competition as between man and man; it is not who can be done first, but who can work best; it is not who can rise highest in the shortest time, but who is working most patiently and lovingly in accordance with the designs of God.

Gen. xii.

ABRAM'S PILGRIMAGE.

IT may surprise you to find, unless you have paid long attention to the matter, how impossible it is to understand some actions unless you know the motive out of which they arose. You would suppose that if you knew any action you would know something that was self-contained and self-explanatory; something, in short, about which there could be no mystery. That, however, is a very serious mistake. That which is apparent is in reality the least part of anything which is not merely superficial and transitory. Whatever has any pith in it, any genuine life and force, is inspired and moved by hidden spiritual influences, over which even the actor himself has but partial control.

Take this expression—"the Lord had said unto Abram." How? As a man would speak to a man? Audibly? What is this Divine voice to the sons of men? Suppose the answer should be, "the Lord came visibly before Abram, and spoke to him in plain Hebrew,"—what then? Many difficulties would arise at once, but no difficulties which faith could not overcome. Suppose the answer should be—"a spiritual revelation was made to Abram, no likeness was seen, no audible voice was heard, but his soul was made aware distinctly and certainly of the Divine purpose,"—what then? Substantially the results would

be the same, and it is with results we have to deal rather than with processes. Mozart says in his letters that, whenever he saw a grand mountain or a wonderful piece of scenery, it said to him—"Turn me into music, play me on the organ"; and Mendelssohn says in his letters to his sister, "This is how I think of you to-day," or "This is what I have to say to you to-day," and then follows a bar or two of music which she is requested to play on the piano or the organ. So the mountain spoke to Mozart, and the organ spoke to Fanny Hensel, and why should we hesitate to say that the Lord spoke to Abram or that he is speaking to ourselves? He spoke to Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abram, Peter, Paul, John; has he ceased to speak unto the children of men? We now say that we have a notion, an impression, a conviction, or a feeling; and considering that our life is so shallow and cloudy, perhaps it is best to speak thus vaguely, but when we get right in soul we shall boldly say, "The Lord calls me; the Lord tells me; the Lord sends me." It will be more filial, more tender, more Christian.

Truly some things that we see in life require more than ordinary influences to account for them, and this going out of Abram from "Ur of the Chaldees" is one of them. According to the account given in chap. xi., it would seem to have struck Terah that it would be a good thing to go to the land of Canaan, and that as soon as the idea struck him he and his family at once started. But, on second thoughts, that is an account of the movement which is extremely improbable. What did Terah know about Canaan? He had no friends there. Nobody had offered him a home there. The people who were there would very likely give him a rough reception. How, then, did he come to move in that direction? We have the answer in chap. xii., ver. 1: "*Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.*"

So, even a journey may be the outcome of an inspiration! "There's a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we may." I feel life to be most solemn when I think that inside of it all there is a Spirit that lays out one day's work, that points out when the road is on the left and when it is on the right, and that tells one what words will best express one's thought. Thus

is God nigh at hand and not afar off. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." And thus, too, are men misunderstood: they are called enthusiasts, and are said to be impulsive; they are not "safe" men: they are here to-day and gone to-morrow, and no proper register of their life can be made. Of course we are to distinguish between inspiration and delusion, and not to think that every noise is thunder. We are not to call a "maggot" a "revelation." What we are to do is this: we have to live and move and have our being in God; to expect his coming, and long for it; to be patient and watchful; to keep our heart according to his word; and then we shall know his voice from the voice of a stranger, for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." If *God* be our supreme consciousness he will reveal his providence without cloud or doubtfulness. I think it can be proved that the men who have done things apparently against all reason have often been acting in the most reasonable manner, and that inspiration has often been mistaken for madness. I feel that all the while you are asking me to give you tests by which you may know what inspiration is, you have little or nothing to do with such tests,—you have to *be* right, and then you will be sure to *do* right.

Possibly, Abram may have got more credit for this journey than he really deserves. It is true that he knew not "whither he went," and by so much this is what is called "a leap in the dark"; but Abram knew two things: (1) he knew at whose bidding he was going, and (2) he knew what results were promised to his faith. There is much more than a command in the text; there is a promise, beautiful as a plentiful vine in autumn: "*I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*" The man who would not go after that would have to justify his disobedience by very strong reasons. We can only move some weights by very long levers. To get a man to leave his "country, his kindred, and his father's house," you must propose or apply some very strong inducement. Now, it is worth while to take notice that from the very beginning God has never given a merely arbitrary command: he has never treated a *man* as a potter would treat a handful of

clay : the royal and mighty command has always ended in the tenderness of a gracious promise. God has never moved a man merely for the sake of moving him ; merely for the sake of showing his power : this we shall see in detail as we move through the wondrous pages, but I call attention to it now as strikingly illustrated in the case of Abram. Some of you yourselves may remember the words "Get thee out," who have forgotten the accumulated and glorious blessing. Let us be just unto the Lord, and remember that he treats us as his sons and not as irresponsible machines.

We need this exhortation the more, as it is incorrectly supposed that we are to act blindly and unreasoningly in the spiritual life. The precise contrary is the reality of the case. "No man hath left father or mother, houses or land, for my sake," says Christ, "but shall receive a hundredfold reward here and life everlasting beyond." If the command is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," the promise is "Thou shalt be saved." If the Lord hath commanded men everywhere to repent, the promise is that he will "abundantly pardon." If the command is "Sell what thou hast," the promise is "Thou shalt have treasure in heaven." So, all through, from end to end, the good of the creature is the object of the Creator.

Does it follow, then, that God gives "the reason why" in the case of every command? Certainly not. Probably he may give no reason at all, and where he does not give a reason he gives in reality the best reason of all. To give his reason would indeed be to propose discussion, but to give a promise is to show that the reason, though undisclosed, is all-sufficient, for in the case of the All-wise a promise is the harvest of which a reason would be but the bare seed. It is true, too, that we can understand a promise where we could not understand a reason : the reason is intellectual, metaphysical, or spiritual, too high or too recondite for our faculties ; but a promise is practical, positive, literal, and if we have faith in the speaker we know that if the promise be so good the command which precedes it must be founded upon a reason equally valid. In reality we have nothing to do with the reasons upon which God's commands are founded. If we meddle with them we shall touch a fire that will burn us ! We are to walk by faith, not by sight. To have

faith in *God* is to comprehend all reasons in one act. I am not to take God in the details of his several commandments, but in the totality, the wholeness of his nature.

Away went Abram from Ur of the Chaldees (Ur of the people of Chesed), and on his way he received a renewal of the promise. Very beautiful was this! It showed that he was on the right road, and that God's faithfulness followed him like an angel of defence. It is so with ourselves on the journey to the better Canaan, where the upper springs never dry, and the summer lies like an infinite blessing over the whole land.

"There shall be no more snow,
No weary wandering feet."

O, fair Canaan! A land so near, did we but know it! Just over the river, the stream, the faint dark rill; it was a river to our youth, it is a stream to our manhood, it will be but a rill to the faith of our old age! And as we move to it, step by step, what words of love and hope are spoken to us by the Lord of the fair land! How he helps us up the steps that are long and hard; how he cheers us along the road that is flat and tedious; how he throws a robe around us when the fierce winds blow upon us in bitter cold!

Yet what are all God's promises when set against the heart that is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked"? When Abram got into Egypt he got into trouble. Just before going into the land he asked his wife to say she was his sister, lest he should lose his own life! Thus we see how strong a man may be—and how weak! Abram could trust a whole destiny to the Lord, but not a particular circumstance in the process! We must meddle a little with the Lord's plan. Just a little to show what managers we are, and how neatly we can turn the corners of life. And what foul finger-marks we leave upon God's work when we touch it! I am not sure that we have met in all the pages we have gone through with anything more humbling than the rebuke given by Pharaoh to Abram, "*And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? Now, therefore, behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way.*" To be reproved by the heathen for telling lies! There

is a lesson here to us who are Christians. When men of the world can justly blame men of the Church, how deep is the stain of guilt which has fixed itself in the very substance of our character :

And yet there is another lesson here which we need quite as much : the lesson of Divine forbearance with human infirmity. God did not cast off Abram, or send him back to Ur of the Chaldees—a man disgraced and condemned. God forbid that I should make any excuse for sin ; yet there are sins that come out of weakness rather than out of love of sin for its own sake. Abram's sin arose rather from weakness than depravity. A great fear seized him. A sudden squall from the hills struck his little boat sharply, and for the time being he foolishly took his affairs into his own hands. "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone" at Abram ! It was something after all, standing between Babylonian and Egyptian idolatry—colossal and splendid—to say, There is but one God and I put my faith in him ! It was a new voice in the earth. It was the first note of Christian civilisation. Now it is common to avow this creed, but it went for something when a Chaldean shepherd declared it amidst polytheistic and sumptuous idolatries. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." Amid all the stars that showered their glittering silver upon the Eastern night he saw one larger and brighter than all others—"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad." Looking at Abram's sin, and trying, possibly, what we may get out of it in excuse of our own, let us in justice remember that if we copy the sin we ought to endeavour to copy the faith. When we say Abram sinned, we ought also to say that Abram was the friend of God ; and if we hide ourselves under the plea of his weakness, we ought also to strive after the holiness and sublimity of his faith.

Gen. xii. 1.

1. "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee."

THE SAME—VARIED.

GOD'S claim upon the individual life is here asserted. God detaches men from early associations, from objects of special care and love, and makes them strangers in the earth. The family idea is sacred, but the Divine will is, so to speak, more sacred still ; when the God of the families of the earth calls men from their kindred and their father's house, all tributary laws must be swallowed up by the great stream of the Divine Fatherhood. These calls, so shattering in their social effect, and so painful in their bearing upon the individual heart, are necessary to shake men out of the secondary positions into which they would settle themselves. All earthly parentage is but a reflection of God's fatherly relation to mankind ; and if we have idolised and abused that which is merely secondary and typical, we need such calls as these to remind us that over all there reigns, in gracious majesty and tender righteousness, the Maker, the Sovereign, and the Redeemer of our lives.

In this call we see an outline of the great providential system under which we live. God comes into a family and breaks it up ; God sets the individual man upon a special course ; God shows the land in which we are to dwell. Up to this point there is harshness in the startling demand. Abram is to go out, not knowing whither ; and if he *did* know whither, still the fact that he was called to break up old and endeared associations is enough to fill him with sorrow and dismay. We must read further, if we would recover composure of faith in God's goodness. The first verse is authoritative ; but man cannot live a great life upon mere authority, even when the authority is known to be Divine. Men would starve on law. To law must be added grace, if the soul is to know all the joy and peace of life in God. Read the next verses, and say if there be in them one tone of severity.

2. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great ; and thou shalt be a blessing :

3. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee : and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Great lives are trained by great promises. The world has never been left without a great promise singing in its wondering and troubled heart—something to rely upon : something to appeal to when difficulty was extreme. God never calls men for the purpose of making them less than they are, except when they have been dishonouring themselves by sin. This may be taken as a law : God's calls are upward ; they are calls towards fuller life, purer light, and sweeter joy. Men do not know their full capacity, except in the service of God : his presence in the soul is a life-expanding and life-glorifying presence. This is the claim that we set up on behalf of true religion—the religion of Jesus Christ—that it exalts human nature, it enriches the soul, it increases the substance and worth of manhood. To confound obedience with slavery is to overlook the argument which is founded upon the nature of God ; to obey the little, the mean, the paltry is to be enslaved ; to enter the cage of custom or passion is to be subject to bondage ; but to accept the invitation of the Sun, and to poise ourselves in his gladdening presence is liberty and joy.

Look at this promise as throwing light upon the compensations of life. Abram is called to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house, and, so far, there is nothing but loss. Had the call ended here, the lot of Abram might have been considered hard ; but when did God take anything from a man, without giving him manifold more in return ? Suppose that the return has not been made immediately manifest, what then ? Is to-day the limit of God's working time ? Has he no provinces beyond this little world ? Does the door of the grave open upon nothing but infinite darkness and eternal silence ? Yet, even confining the judgment within the hour of this life, it is true that God never touches the heart with a trial without intending to bring in upon it some grander gift, some tenderer benediction.

Look at this promise as showing the oneness of God with his people : "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." The good man is not alone. Touch him, and you touch God. Help him, and your help is taken as if it were rendered to God himself. This may give us an idea of the sublime life to which we are called—we live, and move, and have our being in God ; we are temples ; our life is an expression

of Divine influence; in our voice there is an undertone of Divinity.

Look at this promise, as showing the influence of the present over the future: "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This is a principle rather than an exception of true life. Every man should look upon himself as an instrument of possible blessing to the whole world. One family should be a blessing to all families within its influence. Of course, the true and full interpretation of the promise is to be found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Brother of all who receive him by faith into their hearts; yet there are great secondary and collateral meanings of the promise, which ought not to be held in contempt. We should not be looking for the least, but for the greatest interpretations of life—not to make our life as little and ineffective as possible, but to give it fulness, breadth, strength: to which the weary and the sorrowful may look with confidence and thankfulness. Christianity never reduces life to a minimum; it develops it, strengthens it in the direction of Jesus Christ's infinite perfectness and beauty.

4. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

5. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

6. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

There will always be central figures in society: men of commanding life, around whom other persons settle into secondary positions. We cannot all be Abrams; we cannot all have distinct names in the future. Yet, though we cannot have the greatness, we may have the goodness of Abram. But few men in any country touch the highest point of fame; thousands upon thousands, in all generations, come to honour and influence; yet, in a few months after their death, their names cease to have any interest but for the smallest circles. This reflection ought not to discourage virtue. Peace of heart is better than mere renown. To be known in heaven is the best fame. To have a place in the love of God is to enjoy the true exaltation. In the company now

journeying towards Canaan, there is one figure that gives unity and meaning to the whole group, yet there is not one in all the band, whose life, judged by the Divine standard, is unimportant.

The one man, Abram, holds the promise; all the other persons in the company hold it secondarily. All men do not receive the direct revelation and vision of God; they are followers, not leaders; echoes, not voices. Personal supremacy, to be beneficent and enduring, should be the result of Divine election. Abram was supreme because God had called him. The salvation of the soul is undoubtedly an individual act; the soul must think, repent, believe, resolve for itself. No man can repent or believe for another; yet, in the working out of Divine plans, one man must follow another, and be content to shine with reflected light. It is so in statesmanship, in literature, and in civilisation generally. Take Abram away from this group, and the group becomes ridiculous. One man is called to stand nearer God than another, and to interpret the purposes of God to the world. There is an empty defiance which proclaims itself in the well-known terms, "I don't pin my faith to any man's sleeve"; "I think for myself"; there is nothing but vanity in such lofty pretensions, made, indeed, the more mischievous by the grain of truth which barely saves them from the charge of insanity. As a matter of fact, we do pin our faith to each other's sleeve. Lot believes in Abram; the weak believe in the strong; we all follow our respective captains and leaders. Abram was the minister of God to all about him. Had his faith gone down, the whole company would have been disorganised; his followers were courageous in *his* courage, and hopeful in *his* hope. We think it a great honour to be set so high in the service of God; it is so, truly; yet it must be a burdensome responsibility, and often a pricking thorn, for those who follow can bring reproach and calumny to bear upon Abram and Moses and the chosen servants of God. There is a temptation for Lot to imagine himself as good as Abram, and in that imagining is the explanation of many of the petty torments which fall to the lot of men whom God has taken into his secret counsel.

The Abrams of society often have a difficult task. They cannot always explain themselves fully. Sometimes they cannot even vindicate themselves, nor can they account for circumstances

which bear heavily against them. They live a separate life. They have secret intercourse with God. The translation of things heard in heaven is always difficult and often impossible.

7. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.

8. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord.

9. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

We shall be much comforted in this pilgrim-life if we think of God's relation to places, habitations, countries, and geographical positions. The wilderness and the garden are God's; the fountain and the stream are directed in their course by the creating mind. Men are not here and there by haphazard. Cities are not founded by mere chance. Before the city there was a process of reasoning; before the process of reasoning there was Divine suggestion—geography, as well as astronomy, is of God. "The earth is the Lord's." I would be where God wills; with his blessing the desert shall be pleasant as the fruitful field;—without it, the fruitful field shall mock the appetite which it tempts, and the river shall become as blood in my mouth.

Abram set up his altar along the line of his march. Blessed are they whose way is known by marks of worship. The altar is the highest seal of ownership. God will not lightly forsake his temples. This setting up of the altar shows that our spiritual life ought to be attested by outward sign and profession. Abram had the promise in his heart, yet he did not live a merely contemplative life; he was not lost in religious musings and prophesyings—he built his altar and set up his testimony in the midst of his people, and made them sharers of a common worship.

10. And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.

11. And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon:

12. Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.

13. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister : that it may be well with me for thy sake ; and my soul shall live because of thee.

Showing what the best of men are when they betake themselves to their own devices. As the minister of God, Abram is great and noble ; as the "architect of his own fortune," he is cowardly, selfish, and false. I seek for no palliation of such conduct : it invites and deserves malediction and vengeance. In our own life we know what it is to have great faith and great unbelief. Abram went out at God's bidding, cheerfully encountering all the trials of pilgrimage in unknown places, yet he cannot trust God to take care of his wife. How little are the greatest men ! If we are never stronger than our weakest point, we should take heed, lest in our proud sufficiency the dart strike us in the vulnerable spot. It is a bad thing to rack our brains for excuses on behalf of the Bible worthies when they fall ; if God did not excuse them, we need not stretch our charity into a covering for their sins. A lie was twice a lie in the mouth of a man like Abram. Where there was great grace there should have been great courage. We are not to qualify the disgrace by talking about spots on the sun ; we are to call poison "poison," and to learn by the failures of other men that our own life will be called to trials which will need higher strength than merely human power.

The last three verses of the chapter are these :—

18. And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me ? Why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife ?

19. Why saidst thou, She is my sister ? So I might have taken her to me to wife : now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way.

20. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him : and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.

In this matter Pharaoh was a greater, a nobler man than Abram. Natural nobleness ought never to be underrated. Why begrudge to the heathen a nobleness which was as surely of God as our own Christian excellence ? There are men to-day who make no profession of Christian faith : whose honour, straightforwardness, and generosity would put to shame many who claim a good standing in the Church. I make this statement without reservation ; yet it must be explained that it is not because of Christianity, but for the *want of it*, that professors are humbled before men of the world ; and it must be added, that men of natural elevation of

temper and sentiment would attain a still intenser lustre by the possession of that life in Jesus Christ, without which all other life is either artificial or incomplete. Christianity does not equalise the character of all men, any more than the sun equalises the value of all trees. There are Christians who are barely saved from being devils, and if they are this *with* Christianity, what would they be *without* it? Christianity is not to be judged by the lowest, but by the highest. We should not judge the repute of a medical hospital by the attainments of a student who has been scarcely a month within its walls; it would be unfair to judge the master by the apprentice; why, then, seize upon an immature professor of the Christian religion, and judge Christianity by his imperfect and tottering character? We admire Pharaoh in the case before us; we like the clear, steady tone in which he remonstrates with the culprit; yet natural openness and honourableness of disposition must not be valued as a substitute for the renewed life which is wrought in men by God the Holy Ghost.

This incident shows that God calls men to special destinies, and that life is true and excellent in itself and in its influences only in so far as it is Divinely inspired and ruled. "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." The great demand is made upon *faith*. Life is to be *spiritual*; not made up of things that can be counted and valued, but of ideas, convictions, impulses, and decisions that are Divine and imperishable. The world of faith is large, and rich, and brilliant. Those who live in it dominate over all lower worlds. They have their peculiar sorrows, yet they are strong enough to say, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." Have we received the call of God? Has God left us without command or promise? No! Every man of us has heard the command to repent and believe the gospel, and our destiny depends upon the answer we return. We are called to honour, glory, and immortality in Christ Jesus; let us awake and pursue our rugged but ever-upward way!

In view of this incident men may fitly ask themselves at whose

call they are proceeding in life? No man is at liberty to stray away at the bidding of his fancy, upsetting the order of civilisation and inflicting discomfort upon all who are connected with him merely to gratify a whimsical curiosity. Society is founded upon order. Permanence is a condition of healthy growth. On the other hand, where men are called of God to go forth, it should be theirs instantly and gladly to obey, how dark soever or stormy the night into which they move. Life is a discipline. Shrewd men say they want to know whither they are going before they set out on a journey; but men of higher shrewdness, men of Christian faith, often go out into enterprise and difficulty without being able to see one step before them. The watchword of the noblest, truest souls is, "We walk by faith, not by sight"; faith has a wider dominion and a more splendid future. I call upon Christian young men to show *the practical strength of faith*. Don't pick your trembling steps across the stones pioneers have laid for you; be your own pioneers, make your own ways, and show the originality and high daring of profound trust in God. I dare say you may be afraid of rashness—you are partly right, yet it is possible you may hardly know what rashness is. It is certain that the world is deeply indebted to its rash men, its first travellers, its leading spirits. Prudence (in its ordinary but most inadequate sense) has done very little for the world, except to tease and hinder many of its masters and sovereigns; it would have kept back every mariner from the deep, and deterred every traveller from the desert—it would have put out the fires of science, and clipped the wings of poetry—it would have kept Abram at home, and found Moses a comfortable settlement in Egypt. Beware of imprudent prudence; it will lull you to sleep, and bring you to a nameless and worthless end. Make heaven your aim!

"Complain not that the way is long—
What road is weary that leads there?
But let the angel take thy hand,
And lead thee up the misty stair,
And there with beating heart await
The op'ning of the golden gate."

Gen. xiii. 1.

And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him into the south.

ABRAM AND LOT.

THIS is the first time, is it not, that a *rich* man is mentioned in the Bible. I do not remember that we have yet seen that great division of human society which is known by the names of "rich" and "poor." Now there is a rich man before us, and we shall see what rich men do when they are put to it. A wonderful thing it is, by the way, that some men should be rich and others poor : they live on the same earth, they need the same comforts, yet one man seems to have everything and another to have nothing. Behind all this there must be a secret. It certainly looks like an unnatural state of things ; yet we know that if all men had exactly the same to-day, in less than six months we should find ourselves very much where we are now.

In the text we learn that Abram was "very rich," and that Lot "had flocks, and herds, and tents." You will say, then, that this must have been a very happy company of travellers ; they must be so, for they have come out at God's call, they are walking in God's way, and they have flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and every comfort that can be named. But even here a strife arose ! "Their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together." Things got mixed. The cattle ran together so that sometimes the herdmen could not tell which was which ; the count was always wrong at night ; and the noise got louder and louder as the herdmen became fretful and suspicious. It was a quarrel in the kitchen, as we should say nowadays. The masters seemed to get along fairly well with each other, but the servants were at open war. Small credit to the masters, perhaps ! They had everything nice ; the lentil soup and the smoking kid were punctually set before them, and mayhap the wine-flagon was not wanting. But noise travels upward. It gets somehow from the kitchen into the parlour. It was so in this case. Abram heard of the vulgar quarrel and was the first to speak. He spake as became an elder and a millionaire : "Lot," said he "you,

must see to it that my peace be not broken ; you must lay the lash on the backs of these rough men of yours and keep them in check ; I will not stand any noise ; the lips that speak above a whisper shall be shut by a strong hand ; you and your men must all mind what you are at, or I will scourge you all to within an inch of your lives." And when the lordly voice ceased there was great fear amongst those who had heard its solemn thunder !

Now it so happens that the exact contrary of this is true. Abram was older than Lot, and richer than Lot, and yet he took no high airs upon him, but spoke with the meekness of great strength and ripe wisdom. His words would make a beautiful motto to-day for the kitchen, for the parlour, for the factory, for the Church : " Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen ; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee ? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me : if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right ; or if thou depart to the right hand, then, I will go to the left." And instantly Lot arose, and said : " No, mine uncle, this shall never be ; I am the younger ; I am but a follower ; without thee I cannot stand ; if we must part, the choice shall be thine, and what thou dost leave I will take." A beautiful speech for a young man to make : quiet and also great, and full of tender pathos ; but, unhappily, never made by Lot ! This is what Lot really did ; listen : " And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan." And as Lot stole out alone to take another look, he said to himself, " ' It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good ' ; if these rattle-pated herdmen had not come to high words this good luck never would have been mine." And he looked round with the air of a rich lord, and hoped that all quarrels would end as well.

Brave Abram ! we say as we read his words. He walked by faith and not by sight. Certainly his foot slipped in Egypt, but he is strong now, and he looks every inch a king as he stoops before Lot. " Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus ; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God : but made himself of no reputation." It is beautiful to see strength stoop to weakness, but a very hard thing for strength to do.

There is a clause in the story that has much meaning in it

which would be useful to us: "And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land." No doubt their flocks helped to lessen the pasture which had already suffered from want of water, but I wonder whether we are not entitled to say that Abram did not want these strangers to hear any quarrelling amongst the Lord's people. As if he had said: "They are pagans; they are to be sent away from this land; they know not our God; but if we fight and bicker, and if we assail and devour one another, they must think evil of our religion, and they may secretly despise our God. Let us not shame our call and our destiny before the worshippers of idols." This is, at all events, a lesson which we may learn and put in force to-day. The world overhears the Church, and if we scold and fret, and throw hard words at one another, the world may mock us and say how mighty must their God be who cannot still the noise of their vanity and pride. My brethren, the Canaanite and the Perizzite are still in the land! The mocker has come across the threshold of the Church that he may find food for bitter mirth; his ear is set, if haply he can hear one note of discord which he will maliciously magnify into a great uproar. Let us give none occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. Let us forgive one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, and let mercy triumph over the letter of the law.

Now let us look for a moment at Lot's choice. The well-watered plain of Jordan is a great prize for any man, and Lot has made sure of it. His estate is large, and is favoured by the sun and the clouds. Is there, then, any drawback? Read: "But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." A great estate, but bad neighbours! Material glory, but moral shame! Noble landscapes, but mean men! But Lot did just what men are doing to-day. He made choice of a home, without making any inquiry as to the religious state of the neighbourhood. Men do not care how poor the Church is, if the farm be good. They will give up the most inspiring ministry in the world for ten feet more garden, or a paddock to feed an ass in. They will tell you that the house is roomy, the garden is large, the air is balmy, the district is genteel, and if you ask them what religious teaching they will have there, they tell you they really do not know, but must inquire! They will take

away six children into a moral desert for the sake of a garden to play in: they will leave Paul or Apollos for six feet of greenhouse! Others again fix their tent where they can get the best food for the heart's life; and they sacrifice a summer-house that they may now and again get a peep of heaven.

Abram will need some comfort now that Lot has gone. He will want some one to speak to. He will be lonely and dull. Many a strange talk they had at eventide as the great eastern stars came trooping forth from their hiding, and shone like lamps of silver on the crags and the green plains. Oh, the sight! Every star a veiled sun, and the broad moon like the shield of a king waiting peacefully for the fight, yet loathing war. And the two men spoke softly. They lived in a holy church; every wind a sweet hymn, every hill an altar set apart, every star a flaming minister of God. But now Abram is left alone, and he will need more than nature can give him; for nature becomes monotonous, and at last a mockery and a pain. So the Lord came to him and spoke to Abram in his mother-tongue: "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever: and I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee." A sweet word to speak to a dull heart, and a wonderful way of making up loss to a man who has done a brave deed and said good-bye to a friend he loved. God gives land. God gives children. God sends our bread day by day. We think that he looks at us only in church; we forget that he filleth our mouths with good things, and makes our basket rich with all kinds of store. Lot chose for himself. He took things into his own hands, and put himself at the head of his own affairs. What became of his management we shall see presently. He asked no blessing; will the feast choke him? he sought no advice; will his wisdom mock him and torment him bitterly? He snatched at good luck; will he fall into a pit which he did not see? O, my soul, make no model of this fool for thine own guidance. Perhaps his honour is but for a moment. Commit thy way unto the Lord,

and choose nothing for thyself. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths. O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. Seek not high things for thyself, nor take thy life into thine own keeping. O, my soul, I charge thee, live in the secret of Christ's love. Walk in the way of the Lord • seek him always with eager heart, and whether the road be long or short, rugged or plain, it will lead thee into the city where the angels are, and the first-born and the loved ones who left thee long ago.

Gen. xiv.

1. And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel [the representative of Nimrod, the founder of the Babylonian empire] king of Shinar [Babel], Arioch king of Ellasar [the Larissa of the Greeks], Chedorlaomer king of Elam [the most powerful of the Asiatic princes], and Tidal king of nations [chief of several nomad tribes];

2. That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.

3. All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea.

4. Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

5. And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims [giants] in Ashteroth Karnaim [Ashteroth of the two horns], and the Zuzims [strong or mighty ones] in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim [the plains of the cities],

6. And the Horites [the inhabitants of caves] in their mount Seir, unto Elparan [the oak wood], which is by the wilderness.

7. And they returned, and came to En-mishpat [the well of judgment] which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazezon-tamar [the pruning of the palm, afterwards called Engedi, the fountain of the wild goat].

8. And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar); and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim;

9. With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five.

10. And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain.

11. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way

12. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

13. And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.

14. And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed [or drew out, as a sword is drawn from its sheath] his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.

15. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.

16. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

17. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale.

18. And Melchizedek [supposed by some to be a title rather than a proper name, like Pharaoh or Cæsar] king of Salem [Jerome says it was not Jerusalem, but a city near Scythopolis] brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest [this is the first time the word *priest* occurs in the Bible] of the most high God.

19. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

20. And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he [Abram] gave him [the priest] tithes of all.

21. And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.

22. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand [a solemn form of attestation in all nations] unto the Lord, the most high God [El-Elion, Jehovah], the possessor of heaven and earth,

23. That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich:

24. Save only that which the young men [Abram's trained servants] have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.

BATTLE OF THE KINGS

WHEN Lot made choice of the well-watered plain, it does not seem to have occurred to him that it would be a likely place to excite the envy of king and men of war. Like his mother, and ours, he saw that the sight was pleasant to the eyes, and for that reason he put forth his hand and took all he could get. He soon found, however, that there were other people in the world besides himself, and that he could not keep the prize a secret. He would not leave it for Abram's enjoyment, and now we shall see if

he can keep it for his own. Kings were plentiful in that neighbourhood; some nine of them seemed to be within easy distance of each other; and those nine kings divided themselves into fighting parties, four against five, and the four conquered the five, driving the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah into the slime-pits and causing the others to flee to the mountains. Then, conqueror-like, they took everything they could lay their hands upon, and amongst the rest they "took Lot and his goods." But Lot had made a good bargain, had he not? The plain was well-watered, and pasture was everywhere plentiful, and Lot was already a king. It is always those things which we did not expect that upset us! One night Lot heard a noise and could not make out its meaning; in the daylight, however, he saw that unbidden visitors were not far off, and that their plan was not dictated by mutual civility. They fought; the weak ones fell, the swift ones fled, the thriving young Lot was walked off a prisoner of war, and unconsecrated mouths devoured his victuals and his wine. Think of his reflections as he "lifted up his eyes" this time! He was looking round for his uncle;—as you, young man, will one day be looking round for your father—he complained that the grip was too tight upon his arm, and his complaint was answered by a blow that stunned him; the wine he prized most was drunk without a blessing, and the skins were thrown in his face that he might smell the wine he should never drink. And Lot looked round for his uncle! His tent was torn up to make bandages, and his soft mat was thrown upon a beast of burden. He complained again, and the heathen laughed at his accent and told him to go back beyond the Euphrates when he could steal away from their hand. And they bade him speak again that they might have a heartier laugh, and they mimicked this young man who had left his mother to make his future in the west. And Lot looked round for his uncle! As I see him in that poor plight I feel that some bargains are not so good as they look, and that some young men may set up for themselves a little too soon in business. Do not go far out to sea in a cockle-shell. The young man should take the old orator's advice to a young preacher: "Begin low; proceed slow: rise higher; take fire: wax warm; sit down in a storm." Lot got into the storm too soon, and in the battering rain and roaring wind he looked round for his uncle!

The news of the fight was brought to Abram by "one that had escaped," and Abram armed his trained servants and set out to recover Lot. He did not sit in his tent and say, "He left me for his own pleasure, and now he must take the consequences of his selfishness: he thought he could do without me, now let him try." If Abram had said this there would have been a good deal of excuse for him. It would have been most human. We at all events could not have complained with any consistency, for this is exactly what we said when our friend offended us; but, to be sure, we are Christians, and Abram was only a Hebrew: and Hebrews are mean, greedy, crafty, villainous! I find we must beware, though, lest the Jew beat us in noble behaviour! He can be great! He can forgive vile injuries! How much greater should he be who has seen Christ slain and has named himself after the name of the Son of God! How noble his temper, how forgiving his spirit, how hopeful his charity! Charity! Charity thinketh no evil; charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity hopeth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things; charity never faileth! If we could reach this ideal it seems as if we might convert the world by charity alone!

Abram brought back Lot. What side-glances the younger shot at the elder, and how brave he thought his uncle! It is in this way, that is by good deeds, by generous efforts, by high success in lawful daring, that men establish a natural kingship and become crowned without murmur or grudge. It is in this way, as in others, that Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. He does good beyond all other men; he brings the lost lambs home; he sets the star of hope in the cloud of fear; he stands at the door and knocks! A beautiful picture is this of going after captive men and bringing them back to liberty. It is a New Testament picture. We are all taken captive by Satan at his will, and his hand is heavy upon us. Let us who know the joys of liberty go after that which is lost until we find it. Christ calls us to deliver the prey from the spoiler, and to save the lamb from the jaws of the lion. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." "He that winneth souls is wise." "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever."

And now wonderful things take place. The king of Sodom

goes out to meet Abram, and another king of mysterious name came forth with bread and wine, and with a priestly blessing on his lips. He is called Melchizedek, and Abram gives him a tenth of all. Some are anxious to know all about Melchizedek, but I prefer that the cloud of mystery should settle on his name. This wish to know everything in the letter is the curse of the human mind. Curiosity deposes reverence, and sight clamours against contented and holy faith. Oh, beautiful beyond most other scenes is this priest standing in the cloud, as if he had come up from eternity and was rather a voice than a man. And beautiful to think that his bread and wine had been brought from some high sacramental board, mayhap from the upper sanctuary where is the Lamb slain from eternity. I would not question this messenger. He is king and priest, perhaps he is but a shadow projected by One unseen ! Leave the mystery. Do not pluck the stars from their places. By-and-by you will come to another Priest who will give you bread and wine and tell you the meaning of the symbols ; by-and-by you will hear him called Melchizedek, and pronounced to be a Priest for ever. To other priests we have given tenths, to this Priest we must give all. Melchizedek is a mystery ; Christ is a great light. Melchizedek appeared but for a moment ; Christ abideth for ever. Melchizedek showed himself to one man ; Christ fills the world with his presence.

After Melchizedek what could the king of Sodom do for Abram ? The sight of some men transfigures us. We feel after being with them that we can never be mean again. Abram had seen Melchizedek, and the king of Sodom dwindled into a common man. Abram had eaten the holy sacrament, and after that all gifts were poor. Where the city was bad, the probability is that the king was bad too. Abram separated himself from the unclean thing. "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils." "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "The friendship of the world is enmity against God." Can a man rise from prayer to do evil ? Can a man go from the Lord's table, and do the devil's work ? The Church should never put itself under obligation to bad men. The people of God should build their own churches, support their own ministers, maintain the whole scale of their operations, without touching the tainted gold of Sodom, or the ill-gotten booty of Gomorrah.

Gen. xv. 1.

"After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram : I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

ABRAM'S VISION.

AFTER Abram had slain the kings he might well feel uneasy as a stranger in a strange land, for how could he tell how many enemies might be stirred up and what reprisals might come upon him ? He was just in that state of exhaustion and bewilderment in which a word of comfort is especially precious. There are times when we are not sure whether we have done right or not ; we may have been rash ; we may have sinned in our anger ; and we want a word from heaven to tell us that the deed was good and that our soul is safe.

It was in these circumstances that "*the word of the Lord came unto Abram.*" This is the first time that the expression, "the word of the Lord," occurs in the Bible. Afterwards it comes times without number ; but now it comes in all its fresh music. We have often read up to this point that "the Lord said" ; in this new expression it would seem as if the "Word" and the "Lord" were separated, or that the "Word" came separately, as if a messenger or a person. This is all the more likely from what follows : the Word came in a vision ; the Word spoke in its own name ; the Word answered the doubts and fears of Abram. What this "word of the Lord" may be, we are not supposed to know up to this point. We must mark the expression very carefully, and, perhaps, as we pass through the pages, light may be shed upon it. Hitherto the *Lord* has come to men—notably to Adam and to Noah ; now his *word* has come, and come in a vision !

"*Fear not, Abram : I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward*" : this is the first time that the word *shield* occurs in the Bible ; it means defence, guardianship invincible ! What is it that is a shield ? It is the *Word* of the Lord ! Is there, then, something of battle in human life, that such defences should be needful ? Does every man need a shield ? May we not go unprotected into the strife of the world ? The idea of a shield once having been suggested the ages have seized it as a prize and

wrought it into their speech as a tone musical above many. Thus : "God is a shield unto them that put their trust in him"; "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler"; "With favour wilt thou compass the righteous as with a shield"; "Thou art my hiding-place and my shield"; "The Lord God is a sun and shield"; "Behold, O God, our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed." The world will never let a word go out that really touches its heart. There are words that will not be allowed to die. They came into language as by right, and they are welcomed as friends the very first time we hear them. They are, too, nearly always short words, words that a child can say and that the heart needs. Look at such short words as—life, love, peace, rest, faith, hope, home! Words small as drops of dew, yet holding the sun! And, wonderful in graciousness, God himself and his dear Son take up these words and claim them as their own. It is *God* that says "I am thy shield"; it is not a low thought of man's; it is God's own sweet speech; and it is *Christ* himself that says "I am the vine"; "I am the door"; "I am the true bread"; "I am the way, the truth, and the life"; "I am the light of the world." He who would speak to every soul of man, through all time, must speak in figures and stoop to pick up small words.

"*And Abram said, Lord God,*"—this is the first use of those two words together. We have met them singly again and again, and we have met them together in English often in the second chapter, but in the Hebrew this is the first conjunction, the words being *Adonai* JEHOVAH. The same combination occurs only twice more in the whole of the five books of Moses, and these cases are both in Deuteronomy. It is instructive to notice how great words are used in great necessities: this sacred word "shield" is used in the necessity of fear, and this holy word "Lord God" is used in the necessity of doubt and wonder. Eloquence always comes out of necessity. Abram felt that his own short life was too small to hold all the riches that God was giving him. How could the great Euphrates be confined within one man's garden-plot? How could the stars be all crowded into one crown? God had given Abram everything but a child, and therefore it seemed to him that all this flow of God's love was running into a pool where it could only stand still. And Abram told God his fear in plain

words. How true it is that we can say things in the dark that we dare not say in the light! For a long time Abram wanted to say this, but the light was too strong: he knew he would stammer and blush in the daytime, so he hid the fear in his heart. But now it is eventide! The shadows are about, and the stars are coming! O sweet eventide, what words we have spoken in its dewy quietness—words that would have been out of place in the glare of open day! How the voice has become low, and the heart has told what was deepest and tenderest, sending it out as a dove that would find another soul to rest in! It was so that Abram talked to God in the vision that came at star-time. He said, “I have no child; all my goods are in the hands of a steward, a true enough servant, but still not a son; what is to become of all these tokens of thy love?” and whilst he was talking the stars came out more and more, all of them—millions of silvery eyes, throng upon throng, glowing over head, sparkling over the distant hills, glittering in the east, throbbing like hearts on the western horizon, the singing Pleiades, the mighty Arcturus and his sons, Venus and Mars, and the Milky Way (names unknown then), there they were, angels talking in light, servants watching the gate of the King’s city. It was in that hour that the Lord said to Abram, “Look up”; and Abram looked; and God said, “Count them”; and Abram said, “My Lord, who can count that host?” and the Lord said, “So shall thy seed be.”

And now comes perhaps the greatest word yet spoken in human history. I wish we could speak it in the right tone! This is the word, “And Abram BELIEVED”! This is the first time the word *believed* occurs in the Bible. How wonderful this chapter is in the matter of first uses of words! It seems to be a chapter of beginnings. *Believed*,—what a history opens in this one word! The moment Abram believed, he was truly born again. We may see here some of the great meanings of the word. Paul says of Abram that “against hope he believed in hope,” and “that he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.” Here, then, we may study the word at the fountain head. “Believed” means *supported, sustained, strengthened*; Abram nourished and nurtured himself in God; Abram hid his life and his future in this promise, as a child might hide or nestle in a mother’s breast. *That* is faith. He took the promise as a

fulfilment ; the word was to him a *fact*. Thus he was called out of himself, out of his own trust, out of his own resources, and his life was fostered upon God,—he .by-lived, lived-by, be-lieved, God ! It was surely a perilous moment. Appearances were against the promise. Doubt might well have said, How can this thing be ? But Abram “staggered not.” God’s love was set before him like an open door, and Abram went in and became a child at home. Henceforward the stars had new meanings to him, as, long before, the rainbow had to Noah. Abram drew himself upward by the stars. Every night they spoke to him of his posterity and his greatness. They were henceforward not stars only but promises, and oaths, and blessings. Thus dust is turned into flesh ; bread into sacramental food ; and stars become revelations and prophecies.

This act of believing in the Lord was accounted unto Abram for righteousness. From the first, God has always made much of faith. In no instance has it been treated as a mere matter of course, but rather as a precious thing that called for approbation and blessing. Faith was counted unto Abram for *character* ; it added something positive to his being ; he became more than merely harmless ; he became noble, dignified, righteous. To believe, is not simply to assent ; it is to take the thing *promised* as if it were actually *given* ; and this action on the part of man is followed by an exactly corresponding action on the part of God, for he takes the faith as righteousness, the act of belief as an act of piety, a mental act as a positive heroism. What Abram did, we ourselves have to do. He rested on the word of God ; he did not wait until the child was born, and then say, “*Now I believe*” ; *that* would not have been faith, it would have been sight. It is thus that I must believe God : I must throw my whole soul upon him, and drive all doubt, all fear, from my heart, and take the promise as a fact. God asks me to do so ; he says he will give me strength to do so ; he says that without faith it is impossible to please him. Lord, increase my faith ! See how large a life Abram entered into when he believed ! He became a contemporary of all ages, a citizen and freeman of all cities the world over and time without end. Life without faith is an earth without a sky.

Then the covenant was made. Abram wished a ratification to

be given, and God gave it. Blood was shed, fire was enkindled, and words of strange import were spoken. The meaning of those words will appear as we become better acquainted with the history. In our own life there is always some dream yet to be fulfilled. We have not come to the point which we feel sure has yet to be reached. Thus God lures us from year to year up the steep hills and along roads flat and cheerless. Presently we think the dream will come true—presently, in one moment more, to-morrow at latest; and so the years rise and fall, the hope abiding in the heart and singing with tender sweetness; then the end; the weary sickness, the farewell, the last breath, and the Dream that was to have shaped itself on earth welcomes us, as the Angel that guarded our life, into the fellowship of heaven. We call it Dream now; we shall call it Angel then!

Gen. xv. and xvi.

ABRAM'S DOMESTIC LIFE.

I TAKE these two chapters together, as completing one view of Abram's domestic life. It may be well to take notice that, up to this point, everything has gone on in regular order, with the exception of one great and solemn event. We have found just what we might have looked for: the growth of the population, the spreading out of families and tribes into distant places, a little invention, and the beginnings of discovery and progress. There has been nothing unnatural in the history. As we might have expected, domestic life has been carefully and vividly brought under notice. We have had family lists and registers in abundance, for, in truth, there was little else to talk about in those early days. The talk was of the children. To have the quiver full of such arrows was to be blessed of God in the most acceptable way; not to have children was to have great disappointment and distress. Abram had many children in promise, but not one in reality; a joy which he himself could bear, but his wife did not accept the position with so glad a readiness. And out of this want of faith came grief, grief of her own making, but not wholly limited to herself. Want of faith always brings grief. It leads to meddle

someness, and suspicion, and jealousy ; and jealousy is a precipice over which men topple into the pit. Jealousy is as cruel as the grave. Its root is in suspicion. It suspects motives ; it suspects actions ; it suspects innocence itself : then it grows ; it sees things that have no existence ; it looks out under the eyebrows stealthily ; it listens for unusual noises ; it mistakes and misinterprets the ordinary signs and movements of life ; and all the while it is killing the heart that nurses it. Have pity upon people that are afflicted with jealousy. They make you suffer, but they suffer more themselves. Oh, the dreams they have ! The nightmare, terrible as hell, when the serpent rears itself at the bedside and shoots out its empoisoned fang, and coils its infinite length around their resting-place so that they cannot escape. It was so that Sarai dreamed by night, and in the daytime her heart was cruel towards Hagar. It all came from want of faith. She had no deep trust in God. And, observe, if it be not true for ever, that as the religious life goes down the evil powers set themselves up in awful mastery in the heart. O, my friend, keep fast hold of God, for when thy trust goes there is no more peace for thy poor life.

Sarai was so cruel that Hagar fled away from her. Sarai imagined that Hagar despised her. It was all fancy. How fancy tortures us ! It turns the green branches of spring into serpents ; it curdles and rots the milk of human kindness ; it turns the child's sweet laugh into a mocking noise ; it finds hell everywhere ! Beware of thine imaginings, my friend, my brother, my sister—beware ! One wrong turn, and there is nothing for thee but cloud and storm, and weary aching of heart.

The angel of the Lord sent Hagar back again, knowing that "what cannot be cured must be endured." Besides, submission itself, though so hard, may be so accepted as to become useful in the mellowing and strengthening of character. The angel did not say, "Fight it out and let the strong one win." He advised *submission*, and this is the first instance in which such advice is given in the Scriptures. It is a great Christian law, we know, but it is early to find it in Genesis ! "Submit yourselves one to another for the Lord's sake," is a lesson which reads well in church ; but Hagar heard it not under a Gothic roof, half-chanted

by surpliced priest, but "by a fountain of water in the wilderness, in the way to Shur,"—she the only hearer, the angel the priest of God! A good church, too, in which to learn the lesson of submission. I see Hagar taking a draught of the fountain, and trudging home again on weary feet; going back to work among the sharp thorns, and to have words keen as stings thrown at her all the day long. A sorry fate, you say, to be pointed out by an angel! But wait. You do not know all. Who could bear all the ills of any one human life without having some help, some light, some hope? A wonderful word was spoken to the woman—"I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude." As if he had said—"If thou didst know thy destiny, thou wouldst think little of Sarai's mocking; it is but a momentary pain; bear it with the heroism of silent patience." And, truly, this same angel speaks to us all. He says, "If you walk in the way of the Lord you shall have blessing after sorrow, as the flowers bloom after the rain; persecution you cannot escape, nor slander, nor cruel words; but your light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. One hour in heaven will banish every sad thought of earth; submit, be patient, and return not evil for evil." Oh, listen to the angel; it is God's angel; it is God himself!

And now Hagar's days went with a new speed. Sarai mocked as before, but Hagar heard the angel's voice. The words of the angel became a kind of refrain in the melancholy music of her outer life: "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly; the Lord hath heard thy affliction"; these words never cease, and, under their influence, all taunts and sneers and bitter maledictions lost their effect. We, too, might have refrains still tenderer, the recurrence of which would refine and ennoble all coarse and cruel words. Thus: "Fear thou not, for I am with thee"; "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee"; "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper"; "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Ten thousand such promises are to be found in the Holy Word. Choose your own; take the one that fits your woe best, and if you be in Christ fear not to use it when the bitter wind blows fiercely. Hagar left her house in overwhelming distress; she went back to her sufferings with a new hope.

Our sufferings are so different when we take them at the Lord's hand, and endure them because he tells us to do so. We cannot triumph and rejoice in suffering merely on its own account. It is impossible to like pain simply because it is pain. But take the suffering at God's bidding ; say, This is the cup of the Lord and I must drink it for his sake ; it is a burden chosen for me by my Father in heaven ; then you will sing with a new and tenderer emphasis,

"I can do all things, or can bear
All suffering, if my Lord be there."

It was so with Hagar. She had heard the angel's voice ; and ever after, the words of scornful Sarai mingled with the flying wind.

In the seventeenth chapter we read the renewal of the covenant which the Almighty made with Abram, with a clear statement of the terms upon which the covenant was based. Thirteen years at least had come and gone since the promise was given the first time. Thirteen years of waiting ! Thirteen years of mortification for Sarai ! Thirteen years of discipline for Abram and Hagar and Ishmael ! They would have killed some of us : thirteen days are to us eternity. The name Ab-ram which signifies "Exalted father," now becomes Abraham, father of a multitude, and the limited name Sarai (*my princess*) becomes Sarah, *princess* ; the limited becoming the unlimited. Mark how this renewal of the covenant turns upon the consecration of *children*. Hitherto we have to do with grown-up people, but now we are brought face to face with little ones. We have hardly had a child at all as yet in this long history. One wonders what notice God will take of young life ; will he say, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," or will he shut them out of his view until they become great men ? Is a child beneath God's notice ?

"Is it much
Too small a gem
For his diadem
Whose kingdom is made of such ?"

Listen to the covenant : "he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you." What an oversight on the part of the Lord not to observe that a child eight days old could not *under-*

stand what it was about ! What a waste of piety to baptise an infant of days when it cannot understand what you are doing to it ! It cries, poor thing ; therefore, how ridiculous to baptise it ! It plucks the preacher's gown, or chuckles and cooes in the preacher's arms ; therefore how absurd to admit it into the covenant ! For myself, let me say that when I baptise a child I baptise life,—human life,—life redeemed by the Son of God. The infant is something more than an infant, it is *humanity* ; it is an heir of Christ's immortality. If there be any who can laugh at an infant and mock its weakness, they have no right to baptise and consecrate it, and give so mean a thing to God. God himself baptises only the great trees, does he ever baptise a daisy ? He enriches Lebanon and Bashan with rain, but did he ever hang the dew of the morning upon the shrinking rose ? Account for it as you please, God did appoint circumcision for the child eight days old ! Christian baptism is founded upon this very covenant. Abraham was ninety-and-nine years old when he was circumcised, Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, and then came the infant men-children. So in heathen countries, the man is baptised, and the woman, and the child of days. We plead Divine precedent. Whatever objections stand against baptism stand against circumcision, and, therefore, stand against God. The child does not understand the alphabet, do not teach it ; the child does not understand language, do not teach it ; the child does not understand the Lord's Prayer, do not teach it. You say the child will understand by-and-by ; exactly so ; that answer is good ; and by-and-by the child will understand that it was baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, three persons in one God.

Beautiful, too, is Christian baptism when regarded as the expansion of the idea of circumcision. It well befits a tenderer law ; circumcision was severe ; baptism is gentle : circumcision was limited to men-children ; baptism is administered to all : circumcision was established in one tribe, or family, or line of descent ; baptism is the universal rite,—Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. So we go from law to grace ; from Moses to the Lamb ; from the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, to the quiet and holy Zion.

Gen. xviii.

ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION FOR THE
CITIES OF THE PLAIN.

THIS chapter gives two views of life as unlike each other as possible. The one is a quiet domestic scene, and the other a scene of terrible judgment. In the heat of the day Abraham was sitting in his tent under the shade of the trees, when three travellers came unexpectedly upon him. The account reads very curiously; for in the first verse we are told that "the Lord appeared unto Abraham as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day," and in the second verse we read that "three men stood by Abraham"; then in the third verse instead of Abraham addressing his visitors in the plural number he spoke to them as if they were *one* only, saying: "My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant." It was the Lord; it was three *men*! What contradictions we meet in the Bible! How could it be both the Lord and three men; how could there be one, yet three; three, yet one? Easily. The greater includes the less. Reality assumes many manifestations. Blessed is he who sees the Divine in the human, and the human in the Divine. Abraham would have had no difficulty with the Incarnation such as some moderns seem to have. He would have known the Lord at once when he saw Jesus; nay, verily, he *did* see the Christ; Jesus himself said so: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad." That day was always visible to the eye that looked for it. Jesus has always been in the world, but the world as a whole knew him not; here and there some strong heart took hold of him and enjoyed the Gospel beforehand, and thus were the mysteries and the prophets of their day. In those three men at Abraham's tent door, I see the Lord Jesus Christ and two ministers of his, angels armed with the Lord's burning vengeance. How softly the way is smoothed to the end at which the three men were aiming! Thus: they came as ordinary travellers; they bathed their weary feet; they partook of the generous fare to which their host invited them; and in all other ways they seem to have done as other men would have done. Suddenly, however, they asked a question

which might have startled Abraham: "They said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife?" How did they know that Abraham had a wife, or how did they know her name? Are there eyes that can see into our tents? Can any one see through the roof of my house and tell all that is done in the quietest home? The question was not, Art thou married? but, Where is thy *wife*? and not that only, but, Where is *Sarah* thy wife? By-and-by you will hear the Lord say unto Moses, "I know thee by name"; farther on you will hear Jesus say to a publican and a sinner, "Zaccheus, make haste, and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house"; and about the same time you will hear a man ask in a tone of surprise, "How knowest thou me?" If you put all these circumstances together you may reach the conclusion that in all the cases the Speaker was one and the same, and that his name is Wonderful!

Then, once more, Abraham was told that he should have a son. This was indeed weary work for Abraham, for it was quite thirteen years since the promise was first made to him, and now the son was to come next year. Sarah heard this in the tent door which was behind the speaker, and she laughed. Sarah did quite right to laugh if she lived within the range of mere facts. From any side of the *facts* of the case, the thing was ridiculous because impossible. Sarah denied that she laughed, and perhaps her denial was true; she wished to say, "I did not laugh unbelievably in any sense that meant disrespect to the Lord; I did not laugh mockingly or profanely, but in an innocent way, thinking it out of the question that two such old folks should ever have a child." A question had been asked that had made Sarah serious: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" When Sarah heard that question she wished to disown her laughter and to fall into the hands of the Lord. Abraham laughed, and Sarah laughed, and in their laughter there were blended joy, fear, hope, doubt: a right human laughter, yet it did not turn away the good purpose of God.

Then came a matter which in its immediate aspects was more solemn than any other. Thus softly have we been led up to it. The three men had strange work on hand, though they looked so quiet as they sat in the tent. Was the thing to be told to Abraham or not? Was he to know nothing until he heard noises

and saw sights which might well lead him to think that the promise made to him of a son was a bitter mockery? When the whole sky was ablaze, and the air was pierced by beams of fire, and the earth trembled under a terrific blow, what was Abraham to think of the prophecies which had been spoken to his heart? The outward would contradict the inward, and there would be tumult in the good man's soul.

Yes; he would tell Abraham. Two of the travellers passed on towards Sodom. "But Abraham stood yet before the Lord," and he became a priest and an intercessor. Let us follow him in the noble course which he adopted when he was taken into the Lord's confidence.

1. *See how his moral nature is startled at the proposal.* "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" There is a marked difference between the tone of Abraham and the tone of Noah. So far as we can learn from the record Noah did not put any such inquiries as those before the Flood, though, perhaps, they were in some measure rendered needless by the distinct separation of himself on account of his righteousness. Still, the inquiries are intensely interesting as showing how Divine judgments on a great scale strike a pious observer. Could such a thing be *right*? was Abraham's anxious question. A wonderful question, opening up a wonderful range of moral speculation! Remember from whom Abraham held moral nature, and you will see that this very question is itself a tribute to the righteousness of God. The question was an inspiration. And the course which God took in answering it shows that he has ever held it of the first consequence to secure the moral approbation of his creatures. In many things he has transcended their *reason*; in nearly all things he has baffled and even confounded and mocked their *speculations*; but in all instances he has been most careful not to excite controversy against himself in the human *conscience*. If it could once enter the mind of man that God has done *wrong*, that is to say has acted *unjustly*, man would be in a position to vindicate the most strenuous rebellion against his government. That God should tantalise our imagination, limit our influence, determine the measure of our days, and hold us completely under his dominion, are amongst the primary conditions of created life;

but *there must be no dissatisfaction in the conscience*. We must feel that how much soever our ideas are set aside, our *moral instincts* are respected. It is true, indeed, that we may come upon many things, even in moral government, which we can neither understand nor explain; but if where we *can* enter into God's purpose, and the method of its execution, we are enabled to see that *righteousness* is the habitation of God's throne, we are entitled to give our conscience rest in cases which are to our reason inscrutable. Let us be thankful that Abraham raised this question, and that it was raised so early in human history. Its importance is infinite.

2. *See how cautiously, yet how hopefully, Abraham's prayer enlarged itself.* From fifty to forty-five, to forty, to thirty, to twenty, to ten! A whole city would have been spared for the sake of ten righteous men. Here we see a great principle in the government of God. We are sparing others, or are being spared for their sakes. It may be your little child that is keeping the cloud of wrath from bursting upon your wicked house. Even now you may be getting the benefit of prayers your mother prayed long ago. The righteous man has to suffer many disadvantages on account of the presence of the wicked, whereas the wicked man receives nothing but advantages from the presence of the man who is good. Is there, then, injustice with God in this particular? In no wise. For there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not; and there is no man who is inherently and independently good: if you are *now* good, you were once "dead in trespasses and sin," and *then* you were spared on account of the goodness of others. Besides, in proportion as any man is good is he willing to suffer disadvantage and loss rather than judgment should come upon the wicked. God himself suffers most. And if he is long-suffering and pitiful, who are we that we should speak of personal injury and distress? In this passage there are four great facts which should be borne in mind by Christian thinkers and teachers.

First: That God holds inquest upon the moral condition of cities. Second: That God is accessible to earnest human appeal. Third: That the few can serve the many. Fourth: That human prayer falls below Divine resources.

The Lord's people are the first to know the Lord's will. If we

lived nearer heaven we should have earlier notice of God's purposes. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant." "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

Gen. xix. 24, 25.

"Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground."

THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM.

THERE must have been some very strong justification for an act so terrible. This right of destruction may, I think, be fairly inquired into by human reason, and ought to be well studied as a fact that has been repeatedly realised in human history. Understand, if you please, that there is a Power above us which can utterly devour and consume our life. It is important to feel the whole force of this truth, especially as showing that life is not independent and irresponsible; and as showing that we hold it at the will of God, on certain distinct and intelligible conditions, the violation of which simply necessitates our utter destruction. I wish to point out this the more clearly because it might seem as if in giving life God has put it absolutely out of his own power to reclaim or withdraw it: having once given you life you are as immortal as he himself is, and you can defy him to interfere with his own work! The doctrine seems to me to involve a palpable absurdity, and hardly to escape the charge of blasphemy. Throughout the whole Bible, God has reserved to himself the right to take back whatever he has given, because all his gifts have been offered upon conditions about which there can be no mistake. He takes back the life of the body; he takes away the power of reason; he re-claims our

physical strength ; by many a severity he asserts that the earth is his own and the fulness thereof ; yet we are to suppose that he cannot put an end to our whole existence ; it has grieved him, mocked him, defied him, abandoned his sanctuary, violated his laws, slain his Son, quenched his Spirit, given the lie to his promises and heaped up the measure of its iniquity in his very face, but he cannot put an end to it ! Not such is the doctrine I find in the Word of God. There the Lord is King ; his power is infinite ; he *only* has the *right* to live ; he *only* does live, and if *we* live it is because we abide in him, “as a branch abideth in the vine.” I believe that the sovereignty of God is as absolute at the end as at the beginning ; that “he can create, and he can destroy” ; and that we live by his will alone. Furthermore, I can see the infinite reasonableness and justice of this sovereignty ; it subdues all things under the Lord’s feet, and gives him an undivided throne.

In this case we have an instance of utter and everlasting destruction. We see here what is meant by “everlasting punishment,” for we are told in the New Testament that “Sodom suffered the vengeance of eternal fire,” that is of fire, which made an utter end of its existence and perfectly accomplished the purpose of God. The “fire” was “eternal,” yet Sodom is not literally burning still ; the smoke of its torment, being the smoke of an eternal fire, ascended up for ever and ever, yet no smoke now rises from the plain,—“eternal fire” does not involve the element of what we call “time” : it means thorough, absolute, complete, final : that which is done or given once for all.

As I look over those burning cities, and see the “smoke of the country go up as the smoke of a furnace” ; as I see the sharp, keen tongues of flame piercing the gloomy cloud here and there, and catch a faint breath of the poisoned air, I ask myself, *Is this right?* Is God himself justified in sending this horrible desolation upon the earth ? If this were only an intellectual speculation I would not care to spend a moment upon its settlement. It is, however, an inquiry which proceeds from the *conscience*, and therefore its settlement is needful to give rest and satisfaction to the moral life that is in every one of us. To find out whether the judgment is right we must find out the moral conditions which called it forth. And first, it is important to observe that

this judgment was preceded by an *inquiry* of the most unquestionable completeness and authority. Hear this: "And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." You see, therefore, that we are only following the Lord's own example, in asking for information as to moral conditions. It is, then, deeply satisfactory to know that the judgment was preceded by inquiry.

In the next place, the revelation made respecting the moral condition of Sodom is appalling and revolting, beyond the power of words to describe. Let us put the case before ourselves in this way: Given a city that is full of corruption which may not be so much as named; every home a den of unclean beasts; every imagination debauched and drunk with iniquity; every tongue an empoisoned instrument; purity, love, honour, peace, forgotten or detested words; judgment deposed, righteousness banished, the sanctuary abandoned, the altar destroyed; every child taught the tricks and speech of imps; prizes offered for the discovery of some deeper depth of iniquity or new way of serving the devil;—given such a city, to know what is best to be done with it? *Remonstrate* with it? Absurd! *Threaten* it? Feeble! What then? *Rain fire and brimstone upon it*? Yes! Conscience says Yes; Justice says Yes; concern for other cities says Yes; nothing but fire will disinfect so foul an air, nothing but burning brimstone should succeed the cup of devils. Just as we grasp the moral condition with which God had to deal do we see that fire alone could meet wickedness so wicked or insanity so mad.

This view is important not only historically as regards Sodom, but prospectively as regards a still greater judgment. It would hardly be worth while to hold inquest upon a deed that took place innumerable years ago if that deed stood alone; but it does not stand alone; it is part of a great system of providence under which we ourselves live; and it is an illustration of the working of the law by which we ourselves have to be judged. Hence our interest in it. This is no local tragedy. The fire and brimstone are still in the power of God: not a spark has been lost: it is true to-day and for ever that "our God is a consuming fire"! A careful inquiry into the principles which determined the local

and partial judgments of God will give us a clear view of the judgment which is to come upon the whole world. The principles are clearly these : We hold life as God's gift ; we hold that gift upon certain conditions ; we can choose good or we can choose evil ; God loves us, cares for us, has given his Son to save us, and is watching us every moment ; he wishes all men to be saved ; he promises pardon to the penitent, and foretells the death of the impenitent sinner ; by these principles he will judge us, and by these will the wicked go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal. The human conscience must answer, This is *right* ! Such a judgment gives us a sense of *rest*. With *such* a judgment to come, the presumption is that the Providence which leads up to it is as equitable and as sublime as itself. I call you, too, to witness that as God is to judge us, he also himself appeals to our judgment ! He asks us to consider his ways, and challenges us to tell what iniquity we have found in him. Hence in many parts of the Bible, notably in the Psalms, we have judgments pronounced by man upon the Lord, as if the Lord had placed himself at our bar and asked us to acquit or condemn his providence. He proceeds upon reasons. His principles are ascertainable, and such as can be judged ; hear what he says to Jerusalem—" Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me : therefore I took them away as I saw good." And in remembrance of all his ways, severe and gentle, the pouring out of the Flood and the visitation of Fire, the Psalmist says, "The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion ; slow to anger, and of great mercy" ; "The Lord is good to all : and his tender mercies are over all his works" ; "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." In heaven and earth the testimony is the same. "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." "The Lord preserveth all them that call upon him, but all the wicked will he destroy." Wonderful is this, that God should allow us to judge his way ! He does not silence the Psalmist, nor does he reprove the acclaiming angels ; he will be judged by all who are honest in soul. And beautiful, too, is this, that notwithstanding

the severity and awfulness of his judgments, the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works! It does not seem so at the time of the infliction of his judgments. With Sodom and Babylon, Egypt and Tyre, Nineveh and Jerusalem, before us, it does not seem so. But we must look at God's purpose and at great breadths of history, even from the beginning to the end of his ways, and as we see ravages repaired, verdure growing upon the slopes of the volcano, and the blade rising from the dead seed, we too shall say in many a song of thankfulness and joy, "The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy." In the sum total of things we shall see that mercy has rejoiced against judgment, that righteousness and peace have kissed each other, and that all experience says with mighty voice, distinct and far-sounding, *God is Love*.

Returning to the narrative, Lot was saved from the burning, and in truth I cannot but wonder what he was saved for. Compared with the Sodomites he was indeed a man of "righteous soul." I will not question the goodness of his intentions or detract from the almost Divinity of his relative character; but he was a selfish man, little and mean in his notions, and fickle and timid in general bearing. Poor was the bargain he made when he chose the well-watered plain of Jordan! He did not see his mistake at the time. But as he took to his heels that hot morning when the lightning was astir, and as he was nearly choked with the sulphur that rolled in clouds around the skirts of Zoar, he began to think how foolish he had been and how true it is that "it is not all gold that glitters."

Gen. xx.

ABRAHAM AND ABIMELECH.

ABRAMHAM went from Mamre to the south, and found a fertile country lying between two deserts, the desert of Kadesh and the desert of Shur. The earth is not all fertile, or we should think little of it; neither is it all desert, or we should be driven into despair. Abraham, the great man and prophet of the Lord, once more shows his littleness by giving way to a cowardly fear that strangely divided his heart with the noblest faith found in the

ancient world. His fear in one direction was simply ridiculous and pitiful ; when he came amongst a powerful people he was always afraid that they would kill him in order to get possession of his wife : on the face of it the thing would seem to be incredible ; here is a man who left his kindred and his father's house, who braved the hardships of the wilderness, who arose and pursued kings and slew them, and delivered the prey from the hand of the mighty, tottering like a weak old coward when he thinks that he may be killed. He made a mean figure before Pharaoh, and he makes a meaner still before Abimelech. In one sense I am glad that Abraham made such a fool of himself, for had he been without flaw or blemish, perfect and invincible in faith, and complete in the sanctification of his character, he would have awed me by his supernatural respectability, and I should never have thought of him as an example or a pattern. From his own account he told a white lie by keeping back part of the truth.

The thing that is most remarkable in the whole story is that God should apparently have taken Abraham's part instead of humbling and punishing him in the sight of the heathen. To us the Almighty seems to have had just cause for contracting Abraham into Abram, and sending him back into his own country "a sadder but a wiser man." In discussing a subject so delicate we must awaken the attention of our whole mind and heart, for the loss of a word may be the loss of a truth

Observe, first of all, that if the Divine purpose is to be turned aside by the fault or blemish found in individual character, the Divine government of man is at an end, and human progress is an impossibility. Adam failed, so did Noah, so did Abraham, so did Lot. So clearly was it established as a sad and mournful truth that no individual man was perfect, that once and again God was moved to abolish the human race from the earth altogether. It was not Adam that sinned, or Noah, or Abraham ; it was *human nature* that sinned. There seems to be little advantage of one man over another in this or that particular, but the advantage even when real is only partial. Pharaoh seemed to be a better man than Abram, but he was not so in reality. Take them bulk for bulk, character for character, Pharaoh was not to be mentioned with Abram. Esau seemed to be a brave and noble son of the soul, and Jacob seemed to be a sneaking and vile schemer, with

the making of an assassin under his smooth skin ; I admit this fully, but the judgment is not to be fixed at any one point ; you must take the full stretch of time required by the Almighty in working out his purposes, and then it will be seen that under all appearances there was something undiscernible by the human eye, which made every man chosen to leadership and renown in the holy kingdom the best man that could have been chosen for the purpose. You say that Abimelech was better than Abraham ; now let me ask you what you know about Abimelech ? Nothing but what is stated in this chapter. Very well. You are so far right. You have seen Abimelech at his best and you have seen Abraham at his worst, and then you have rushed to a conclusion ! This is not the right way to read history ; certainly it is not the right way to read the Bible. We are not to set act against act, but life against life. If we were to set act against act, we should reverse the most solemn verdicts of history, and disennoble some of the very princes of human kind. You have seen a professing Christian in a bad temper, and you have seen a man who made no profession of Christianity unruffled and serene, and instantly you question the sincerity of the professor and sing the praises of the pagan. And you point to facts in justification. Now your reasoning may be wrong, your facts may be illusory, and your judgment may be most unjust and cruel. It is quite true that you have seen the one man in a stormy passion, and the other man without a flush of colour on his pale cheek, and it is quite possible that in the particular case referred to the professor may have been wrong and the pagan may have been right ; but take them life for life, spirit for spirit, character for character, through and through, and no man who is without Christ can compare for true and lasting dignity of soul with the least in the kingdom of heaven.

This principle may help us to come to larger and juster judgments of human character and human history. We must not judge the universal by the local. When I think of the meanness of Adam, the drunkenness of Noah, the selfishness of Lot, the cowardice of Abraham, the cunning of Jacob, the sensuality of David, and the inconstancy of Peter, my first wonder is that such men should have a name in the Divine history at all. But therein I show my folly not my wisdom, and I may show my impiety,

too, by my setting up my morality against the righteousness of God. It is easy for me to compare the flat and insipid respectability of some of my own acquaintance with the painful characteristics I have just named, and to depose the great historical characters in favour of my unimpeachable friends. But where would my unimpeachable friends have been *in the same circumstances*? And what have they ever done to show that they would have stood where Adam fell, and that they would have been bold where Peter shrank and lied?

This, then, is the point at which I find rest when I am disturbed by the evident and painful immorality of illustrious Bible characters, viz., human nature has never been perfect in all its qualities, energies, and services; the perfection of human nature can be wrought out only by long-continued and severe probation; in choosing instruments for the representation of his will and the execution of his purposes, God has always chosen men who were best fitted *on the whole* for such ministry, though in some particulars they have disastrously and pitiably failed. When I think I could have improved God's plan, the mistake is mine, because my vision is dim and I never can see more than a very limited section of any human character.

In the next place consider, knowing human nature as we do, how beneficial a thing it was to the great men themselves to be shown now and again that they were imperfect, and that they were only great and strong as they were good—as they were true to God. To be an illustrious leader, to have power and authority amongst men, always to be in high places, and to be absolutely without a fault of disposition, temper, or desire, is enough to tempt any man to think that he is more than a man; and even to be without actual social fault, that can be pointed out and blamed, is not unlikely to give a man a false notion of the real state of his own nature. We may learn quite as much from our failures as from our successes. I have seen more truly what I am by my faults than by my graces, and never have I prayed with so glowing a fervour as when I have seen that there was but a step between me and death and that I had nearly taken it! Speaking of faultless men I am reminded of Enoch. It is on record that "Enoch walked with God." I fear that these words may not be always fairly applied. Let me point out to you the difference

between a contemplative and an active life. It is clear from the very form of expression that Enoch was of a retiring and meditative character. He loved the quiet nook in the hill. You find him away under the whispering trees, with eyes now fixed on the ground and presently lifted towards heaven in tender and expectant prayer. Let me ask you, What has Enoch done for the human race? What dangers has he braved, what battles has he fought, what heroisms has he displayed? Compare the position of Adam with the position of Enoch! Compare the valour of Abraham with the peaceful disposition of Enoch! This, I contend, is the just and honourable course of criticism. When men return from the far-away battle-field, I shall stand upon the shore and watch their debarkation. The artist who has drawn the pictures shall pass in cordial silence; the literary correspondent, who has given graphic accounts of the bloody fray, shall have a friendly salute; the ornamental soldier, who returns without scratch or stain, shall have a look of suspecting wonder; but the grand old general who led the fight—who has come home with battered helmet and dented shield, maimed, torn, half the man he was when he went out, whose old likeness we have to search for through scars and seams that tell of heroic suffering—when he steps forth, every war-mark shall make him dear to us, and, as his brave old limbs limp under him, we shall hail him as a patriot, a soldier, and a friend.

Do we, then, find any justification of our own evil-doing in these reflections? I answer, not one tittle of justification. God forbid! I am seeking to justify *God*, not to justify *man*. We are called to holiness, to honour, to purity, to nobleness: to all that is beautiful and resplendent in character. To this end Christ died; to this end the Holy Spirit works; to this end our whole being should move in one strenuous and hopeful effort. And yet in thought, or word, or deed; by fear, or unbelief, or selfishness; by suspicion, envy, jealousy, or uncharitableness, we may slip and even fall many times by the way. But if the root of the matter be in us; if, under all our faults and sins we have that true faith which is the gift of God, and that deep love which lives through our inconstancy amounting sometimes to treason, and if we press and strive towards better things, we shall find in the last result at the God's grace is greater than our sin, and that we shall be saved if only "so as by fire."

Gen. xxi. 14.

"And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba."

ISHMAEL.

THE first feeling we have in reading the story of Hagar and Ishmael is that they were both most cruelly used. If you were to read this story in the newspapers, as an incident happening in our own time, you would strongly condemn both Abraham and Sarah his wife. Hagar and Ishmael were cast forth out of the house of Abraham. Hagar received from Abraham "bread and a bottle of water," and she and her child "departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba." They were sent away from comfort into destitution, and this, so far as we know, for no crime. Some offence may have been given to Sarah, an offence which Sarah visited with most excessive and unpardonable resentment, as it appears to us on the face of the story. The very reading of it makes us the eager partisans of Hagar. We instantly take sides with her in the hour of her injury and pain, and in her affliction we are afflicted with great distress. This woman was wronged, and in her suffering all other generations of women have been disennobled and outraged. It was indeed with no readiness of will that Abraham responded. "The thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son."

The first feeling is that a most cruel act has been done. The next feeling is that surely we do not know the *whole* case. It must be only the *outside* that we see. Behind all this there must be something we do not fully understand. Hagar would never go away so quietly of her own will. Ishmael, seventeen years old, would surely show some sign of discontent and rebellion. How is it that people go out to poverty, to loneliness, to all hardness of life, so *quietly*, so *dumbly*, with only great hot tears in their eyes, and no sharp word of reproach or revenge on their lips? Had they gone away, Hagar and Ishmael, with violent upbraidings and threats hurled at the heads of those who banished them, the pathos would have been lost; the story would have been only a noisy brawl—a women's fight, in which the weakest got the

worst; that is all, nothing more! But what of this strange quietness? Can the heart be hushed by voices which the ear cannot hear? Can the poor fickle will, which so often mistakes petulance for strength, be touched from infinite heights by a tender and pitiful omnipotence which is working upon a sphere so vast that anything we can now see of it is as a straight line? When the first flush of anger dies away I begin to wonder whether there may not be something behind, which when known will explain everything, and add to this confused and riotous life of ours a solemnity and a grandeur supernatural! Through this incident, as through a door ajar, we may see a good deal of human life on what may be called its tragical side. The *details* are ancient and local, but the *meaning* is flowing around our life to-day and should be understood by all who are seeking the great principles rather than the passing accidents of human history.

1. As a mere matter of fact there are events in human life which cannot but affect us with a sense of disorder in the government and administration of things, if indeed there be either government or administration. One is taken, another left. One moves upwards to wealth and honour, another is neither prosperous by day nor restful by night. Sarah is the centre of a home; Hagar is a vagrant in the wilderness. Isaac is the idol of two hearts; Ishmael has no father, and his mother's poor life throbs between the points of disgrace and helplessness. Such is human life as we ourselves know it. This is not fancy; it is fact. You know it; you represent it; it is your own strange, perplexing, immeasurable life. You may take one of two views of this state of facts

(a) Life is a scramble; the strong man wins; the weak man dies; Luck is the only god, Chance is the only law, Death the only end. Suffering is the price paid by weakness for being allowed to exist, and poverty is the penalty a man pays for being conscientious. Society is the triumph of confusion. It is a giddy whirl, and nobody can tell who will be down or who will be up at the next turn of the wheel. The disorder of human life mocks the order of material nature. Or thus:

(b) There must be a power mightier than man's, controlling and shaping things. Looking at human history in great breadths we see that even confusion itself is not lawless; it is a discord

in the solemn music; it is an eccentricity in the astronomic movement; but it is caught up by the great laws, and wrought into the general harmony; above all, beyond all, there is a benign and holy power. Now from my point of view it requires *less faith* to believe this than to believe the other. The man who judges universal providence by solitary instances, is a man who would prove to himself that the earth cannot be a globe so long as there is a molehill upon its surface. He denies that the universal can affect the particular, and that the temporary can be swallowed up by the eternal.

Prove that an action or an event begins and ends in itself, and you establish a special law of judgment; but let it once be allowed that actions and events are not self-contained; that they have antecedents and consequents; that they are modified and sometimes counteracted by unexplained and unexpected influences, and at once you introduce new laws and new standards of judgment. You have then an unknown and most subtle element to deal with. It may surprise you by new revelations any moment. It may make the desert blossom as the rose, or it may turn the fair garden into barrenness. You cannot measure it by your reason; you cannot control it by your skill; you cannot avert it by your adroitness. It takes its own time, sometimes little, sometimes much. It works in its own secret but sure way. It is silent, mighty, irresistible.

2. As a further matter of fact in human life, there are cases marked by utter *despair*, for which it seems utterly impossible that any deliverance can ever arise. Hagar's is a case in point. Her water was spent. The hot sun was beating on her head. Ishmael was faint with weakness. There was no one to speak to. No human friend answered the appealing voice. Some of us may have been in the same circumstances as to their effect upon the soul. When you were left a widow with six children—no fortune, the water gone, the children crying for bread, the officer at the door, you wished to die; you were subdued by a great fear. But I ask you, in God's house, if there were not made to you sudden revelations, or given to you unexpected promises that brought light to the weary and hopeless heart? How did friends appear, how were doors opened, how did the boys get a little schooling and get their first chance in life? Are you the person

now to turn round and say that it all came by chance, or will you not rather exclaim, "This is the Lord's doing; I was brought low and he helped me"?

And what men God trains in the wilderness! It would seem as if great destinies often had rough beginnings. "I will make him a great nation," said the angel of God. We must go down to go up. We must suffer if we would be *strong* with other than a rude unmellowed power. Why this is human history repeated in an individual example! Man's story had a rough opening. Adam, in blighted Eden, was as Ishmael in the inhospitable wilderness. God knows what we need, where we are, and when to come for us. Compare your present self with your former self, and say if God be not as gracious as he is mighty. If you could take out of your character all the fine elements which have come into it through sorrow, you would be turned into a crude and selfish creature. Sorrow, rightly accepted, sorrow sanctified, refines the gold of life; it raises the heart into noble elevation of feeling; it enriches the memory with many helpful recollections; it conquers and destroys the spirit of unbelieving and selfish fear. My friends, God would make us very poor if he took from us the results of sanctified sorrow.

3. You will bear me witness, as a further matter of fact, that life is full of surprises and improbabilities, and that the proverb, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," is supported by innumerable instances. "God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water." She expected to die; and lo, she never was so sure of life. Ishmael withered only at the top, not at the root, for out of that root was to spring a great nation. These surprises not only save life from monotony, they keep us, if rightly valued, lowly, expectant, dependent. *They operate in two contrary ways*—lifting up man, and casting him down.

4. As a matter of fact, the men who seem to be the most prosperous have trials of a heavy and most disciplinary kind. Early in the morning Abraham sent Hagar away; early on another morning a heavier cloud gathered over his horizon, and a keener pang tortured his heart. It seems as if great nations must be built upon ruins—as if great prices must be paid for great honours. Ishmael is to die of thirst; Isaac is to perish by the knife—did ever brilliant destinies arise from such flickering

embers? My friend, thou knowest not what thou shalt be, or thy children; life is very low with thee just now; it may be because immortality is so near!

I have not far to go for an evangelical application of this incident. It is in our *despair* that Christ brings his Gospel to us. It is when there is no well that he smites the rock. It is when the knife is lifted over our heart that he becomes a "Lamb" for us!

Gen. xxii. 2.

"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

THE OFFERING OF ISAAC.

IT must have seemed hardly possible to the patriarchs, and the elder Hebrews generally, that God could have made the heavy demands upon their trust and love which they were almost daily required to satisfy. In saying this I am judging primitive faith by modern religion: I am in fact judging Abraham by ourselves! Suppose that it should be borne in upon our mind, as the current phrase is, that we should do this or that great thing, requiring special self-denial and personal suffering, we should instantly reason that such a mental impression was the result of mental disorder or of physical derangement; the very last idea that would occur to us is that God meant to bereave and humble us until he had by suffering perfected the sanctification of our will. It is, therefore, the more startling to find Abraham, instantly, without fretful appeal or pathetic argument, going forth to a deed so terrible as the offering of his son, his only son Isaac, whom he loved. I propose to point out certain features of this severe trial, which closely resemble some of the operations of Divine Providence known to ourselves, and thus to confirm ancient and modern revelation, and so get some notion of the unity and completeness of human discipline and training. In a word, I want to show that the God of the Jew is the God of the Christian, and that the God of Abraham is, in the widest sense, "the God of the living."

1. The experience of Abraham and our own experience are strikingly coincident in the fact that we are often exposed to great trials *without any reason being assigned for their infliction*. Notice this in the case of Abraham. In the very midst of his domestic joy this desolating word falls. We do not read that Abraham had been committing sin, or that in any way he had been provoking the Most High to anger. From our point of view this trial is wholly without cause or reason, and the terms read like an edict of wanton and ruthless cruelty.

Such experiences are far from uncommon in our own day. We see human fortunes reversed without any apparent reason; the innocent are impoverished and scourged; men are paralysed in the very attitude and act of prayer; honestly-gotten wealth is scattered beyond recovery; the most useful workers in the Church are laid aside by sickness; and they who would gladly be foremost in the fight are made to stand still because of pain and helplessness. No reason is given. No justification is offered. The fearful demand is made point-blank, and no compromise is possible. God sometimes insists upon a distinct Yes or No, and then to falter is to rebel.

In this part of the case it is not proper to say that all men have sinned, and that the universal fact is explanation enough of the particular instance. That suggestion would cover too much ground; more, indeed, than is covered by the kind of providences now being considered. Universal depravity is of course the most mournful fact in human history, and, if followed in each instance with a trial as special as Abraham's, the reasoning would be sound. But we are looking at the case of men who stand nearest God, who love him most, and whom he himself most delights to honour, and we find that *they* are called upon to bear trials of unexampled and intolerable severity, without one word of explanation or argument. When such trials are accepted in a filial spirit, the triumph of faith is complete. Such faith is counted unto men for righteousness. It is not a faith that hesitates and falters and struggles; it is a faith victorious in its way even infinite and omnipotent.

2. The experience of Abraham and our own are further coincident in the fact that even in our severest trials, in the very crisis and agony of our chastisement, *we have hope in the delivering*

mercy of God. This is strikingly shown twice in the story before us. "Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (v. 5). Mark the promise to come again! It would be pitiful trifling with the solemn occasion to say that Abraham lied unto the young men. The man who could offer such a sacrifice was not the man to tell lies to the on-lookers. In the next instance, Abraham said to Isaac, "God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (v. 8), when he knew that Isaac was appointed to the altar! It is so often in human life that the inward contradicts the outward, and that the unseen controls that which is seen. Terrible as the storm may be, yet far away in some dim chamber of the heart is an angel singing softly of hope, and light, and rest. Sometimes it is a voice without words; a solemn sound that never comes within the narrow range of articulation; yet it is as a rock on which the soul builds. "We will come again," said Abraham, when the very earth was reeling under his feet! "God will provide himself a lamb," said he, when the appointed victim was walking at his side. All this is true to life, as we ourselves know it. We have said these very words. We have said things to dying friends which would not bear a strictly literal test of accuracy, yet which were true in larger interpretations than literal exactness could comprehend or contain. Sometimes we have spoken in the power of the spirit, when men have limited us by the poverty of the letter. It was so that Jesus Christ himself was often misunderstood. He gave infinite meanings to finite words, and so he was constantly being contradicted by students of the mere letter. He said he would "build the temple in three days"; he said that he was "before Abraham"; he said that the dead Lazarus was "asleep." Faith often substitutes a greater fact for a small one. The parable overruns the mere history. "You will get better," we say to the patient, when perhaps we mean that he will be healed with immortality; and when we meet him in heaven he will tell us that we were right when we said he would yet live. Sometimes we wist not what we say. Let us then be careful how we charge one another with false speech, for there is a fiction that is not untrue.

3. The experience of Abraham is coincident with our own in

the fact that we are often made to feel the uttermost bitterness of a trial *in its foretelling and anticipation*. Say whether you ever read anything so terrible as the second verse: "Take now thy son—thine *only* son Isaac—thine only son Isaac, whom thou *lovest*—and offer him for a burnt-offering"! The words must have dropped into Abraham's heart like molten lead. But not more hotly into his heart than some words have dropped into our own. Slowly has the finger of God moved over our most cherished treasures, marking them for ruin. They have not been spoken of in the gross, or hurriedly, as if with reluctance, but slowly, lingeringly, with a deliberation that aggravated the cruelty, until the steadiness of reason itself has been threatened. It was so with the regular and inexorable "calls" of the bankrupt bank in which you placed the savings of an industrious lifetime—it was so in the accursed chancery suit which remorselessly stripped you of everything; and it was so in the shutting of door after door, until your last hope died, and you plunged into the black river of despair. A sudden reversal is nothing compared with the lingering death which some men have to die. They die upwards, inch by inch—the light brings them no hope, and spring brings no renewal of their withered strength. If we meditate on these things, and study their plain and solemn meaning, we shall see that we ourselves and Abraham have been afflicted with common sorrows.

4. The experience of Abraham and our own are coincident in the fact that *filial obedience on our part has ever been followed by special tokens of God's approval*. We have something more than mere Hebrew redundancy of language in the promise made to Abraham by the Almighty. Hear how that promise reads. It reads like a river full to overflow: "Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." I do not know of a more striking realisation of the promise, "I will open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." I call upon you to witness whether you

yourselves have not, in appropriate degrees, realised this same overflowing and all-comforting blessing of God, in return for your filial obedience. Have you ever given money to the poor without repayment from the Lord? Have you ever given time to God's cause without the sun and the moon standing still until you had finished the fight, and made up for the loss? "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." Exceeding great and precious are the promises of God! He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think!

Other points of coincidence as between the old experience and the new will occur on reading the text, such as (1) the unconscious aggravations of our suffering made by inquiries such as Isaac's (v. 7); (2) the wonderfulness of the escapes which are often made for us (v. 13) by Divine Providence; and (3) the sanctification of special places by sweet and holy memories of deliverance and unexpected joy (v. 14). But the supreme lesson which I would learn from this history is that Almighty God, in the just exercise of his sovereign and paternal authority, demands the complete subjugation of our will to his own. This is a hard lesson for man to learn. Man loves his own will. He thinks it best. He clings to it long. It is just here that the great battle must be fought. We are not called upon to give up one taste out of many; one pursuit out of many; one wish out of many; we are distinctly called upon to give up everything—to sink our will in God's; to be no longer our own; to sum up every prayer with "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." That is pure religion before God and the Father. "Except a man deny himself, and take up his cross daily, he cannot be my disciple." If God wants your only child to be a poor missionary, when you mean him to be a rich merchant, let him be laid upon the altar if you love and honour God! If God strip your vines, and take away the one ewe lamb; if he bark your fig-tree, and cause the herd to die in the field—you are to say—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." And

never can we say this with the heart's full consent until we are crucified with Christ. We must say our greatest lesson after him. He speaks first, we speak second. He is the Master, we are the scholars. Lord, if thou wilt break the last link, break it; if thou wilt take away my last morsel of bread, take it; "though thou slay me, I will trust in thee."

Gen. xxiii.

THE BURIAL OF SARAH.

IT has been remarked as a singular circumstance that Sarah is the only woman whose age is mentioned in the Scriptures. At the time of her death her only son Isaac was thirty-seven years old, she herself being ninety at the time of his birth. We know little about Sarah, except that she was comely to look upon; somewhat severe towards Hagar her handmaid, and that she was the mother of Isaac! This seems quite little when mentioned in one sentence, but really it comes to a great deal in the full working out. Her good looks made travelling rather dangerous for Abraham; her conduct towards Hagar showed her temper and moral quality, and her motherhood of Isaac made her the mother of all believers (1 Peter iii. 6). How large an oak may come out of one acorn! As we are about to attend the burial of Sarah, we should reflect a little upon the lessons of her life before we leave the cave of the field of Machpelah, which is in Hebron in the land of Canaan.

Some of us have to live in a kind of reflected lustre and fame. We are next to nothing in ourselves, but our brother is famous, our uncle is influential; we have not seen the Queen ourselves, but we have seen a man who has seen her. Sarah was not much in herself, but she was the wife of Abraham. The window of your cottage is a very small one, but it looks out upon a park three thousand acres large. Some of us get our lustre at third or fourth hand, and of course it gets paler and paler as it comes along. John Stradwick kept a shop on Snow Hill; John Stradwick was the first deacon of one of the London Congregational churches; John Stradwick let a room or two above his shop, to

lodgers; one of his lodgers was called John Bunyan; John Stradwick had a daughter and that daughter married Robert Bragge, and Robert Bragge was one of the pastors of this church! I like to think of one of my predecessors and his wife being with Bunyan in his last illness, and getting a grip of the tinker's hand now and then.

This is a long way to have fetched one's water, I admit; but when it is brought to me it is like water from the well of Bethlehem, and there is none like it! After all it is something to be in the tail of a kite if the kite be beautiful and a good flier. Even Boswell has become as one of the rings of Saturn. I should account it a fine thing if I could have an hour's talk with one of Shakespeare's servants, or spend a whole day with Luther's sexton. If I made right use of my time I should feel that I had been in high company and had touched the threshold of immortal fame. Now these are only the lower applications of a principle universal in its operation and influence, and which reaches its highest point in Christian fellowship. I can come to One in the touch of the hem of whose garment there is eternal virtue! Poor though we be and nameless, yet if we be in Christ Jesus, we come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. Nothing in ourselves: we are yet kings and priests unto God! Our torch is lighted at the sun.

Some people have to wait a long time for their blessings. Sarah was ninety years old when Isaac was born. This thing itself is merely accidental, but the principle which is under it is living and beneficent. If we have the true life in our hearts, not one of us has yet seen his best days. Physically we may be on the wane; but spiritually we may win our greatest victories actually on the day of death. You have not yet got the best your brain can give. There is a finer wine in your heart than has yet been crushed out. Do not close the shutters, rather break out another window, for the light of the sun is yet plentiful. You may bring forth fruit in old age, and be fat and flourishing until the last. You have not got God's best. He keeps the good wine for by-and-by. I hear your sigh and your groan, and for every one of them you shall yet have a hymn or a loud psalm. Your great prayer shall

be answered : the prayer that drags your heart out in passionate entreaty for the runaway boy, for the lost girl, for the healing of a wound in the spirit never spoken to mortal ear ! Live in this hope, and this hope will keep you young. Sarah laughed at ninety, and made all her friends laugh in her late-come joy.

And now that Sarah is dead, Abraham came to mourn and to weep for her. But was not Abraham a man of faith ? Yes ; but he was a man of feeling too, and his piety did not make his heart hard. But was not Isaac his son alive ? Yes ; but a love ninety years old, and tested in many a sharp flame, was not to be given up lightly. It is a hard thing to part with those we have known longest and best. When such parting comes, " 'tis the survivor dies " ; memory is quickened into strange vividness ; the past life comes up and passes its days before the eyes in all their variety of colour and service. I hear Abraham talking to himself : " Oh, how sad is this loneliness ; how awful is the stillness of this silence ; I can talk to Isaac, but not as I did to his mother ; there are some eighty years of life that he knows nothing about ; Sarah and I wandered together, talked out our hearts to one another, planned and dreamed and suffered in one common experience, and there she lies a stranger amongst strangers, cold and silent for ever ! " And Abraham wept ! The man who slew the great kings, wept ! The man whose name is to endure as long as the sun, wept ! *Jesus* wept ! Blessed will those of us be who have not to weep over neglect, harshness, bitterness ; over speeches that made the heart ache, over selfishness that hastened the very death we mourn ! If you would have few tears by-and-by, be kind now ; if you would have a happy future, create a gracious present. Make your homes happy ; banish from the sacred enclosure of the family all meanness, hardness, suspicion, and unkindness ; that when the dark day comes, as come it will too soon, your deep and tender sorrow may not be mixed with the bitterness of self-reproach.

This is a sharp variety of experience for Abraham. In the last incident how brave he was, and what a kingliness dignified even the stoop of his sorrow as he went with Isaac to the altar ! What is the difference between his case then and his case now ? It is the difference between *doing* God's will and *suffering* it. A

wonderful difference as we all know ! So long as we have something to do, something to call us from pensive meditation and set us to hard strife, we bear up with hopeful courage ; but when the strife ceases, and we are left alone with the wreck it has wrought, we often express our emotion in tears which never came during all the battle. Such an instance as this goes far towards proving that Abraham's faith was as human as his sorrow. If we can join him in grief, why not in faith ? If we thought him nearly Divine on Moriah, we may see how human he is in Hebron. As for ourselves, we can fight resolutely ; can we suffer patiently ? We are heroes whilst the sound of the trumpet is maddening the air ; what are we when laid up as wounded soldiers ? The patient, uncomplaining sufferer, who for months or years has been waiting for her Lord, without ever suggesting that his steps were tardy, may have as strong a faith as Abraham had when he held the knife over his son. All the world's faith is not historic. To-day has its chronicles of trust and patience, and hope, quite as instructive and thrilling as those which are recorded in the Bible. It is too early to read them through, or to comprehend all their sad, yet glorious meaning ; but every syllable is accepted and honoured of God. We often wish that we were as good as the holy men of old ; it will be a poor thing, however, if we are not better than the best man in any earlier dispensation. Among all that were born of women there had not appeared a greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he. So may we be greater than Abraham, by reason of Jesus Christ's promise that we should not only have life, but have it "more abundantly." That some of the older generations might have greater gifts is not denied ; but none of them had opportunities of having greater graces. They had special inspiration : we have the general baptism of the Spirit ; they saw the unrisen light, we see the sun in a cloudless zenith. My opinion is that God never had better children upon the earth than he has at this moment ; never was there such force of life, never such loyalty to the kingdom of heaven. We do not, then, set forth Abraham as a Divine model ; we call up his history to see its points common with our own, to study the unchangeableness of God, and to take an estimate of the development of human destiny.

Look at Abraham buying a grave ! True, he buys a field, and

a cave, and all the trees that were in the field, and in all the borders round about ; but, expand the list as we may, it was all for the sake of a place to bury his dead. The good man is forced into such commerce as well as the bad ; the best man of his age is here bargaining for burial ground. I need not remind a Christian congregation of the advantages which a good man enjoys under such circumstances. To him the place of Christian sepulchre is not a wilderness given over to the desolation of everlasting winter ; it is a garden, full of roots, that shall come up in infinite beauty in the summer that is yet to be. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." The law of mortality will operate until the close of this dispensation ; all lower life has been given over to death ; but death itself has been devoted by an unchangeable covenant to be destroyed by life. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Meanwhile we require graves. Our houses are overshadowed by a temporary destroyer ; we are smitten and impoverished by the angel of death. All this we know as a matter of fact ; in talking thus I trouble you with the tritest truisms ; but have we turned our knowledge to account ? Have we read the meaning of the shadow that lies along the whole path of life ? Have we so balanced our proportions as to give to each its honest due ? Have we not, on the contrary, forgotten our own mortality even in the very act of talking of other men's deaths ? What need there is then that we should see this transaction between Abraham and Ephron : listen to the words of the covenant, and ponder well that in return for four hundred shekels of silver Abraham gets a burying-place !

"From the stars of heaven, and the flowers of the earth,
From the pageant of power, and the voice of mirth,
From the mists of morn on the mountain's brow,
From childhood's song, and affection's vow,
From all save that o'er which the soul bears sway,
Breathes but one record,—Passing away!"

The matter in which the children of Heth answered Abraham should attract the most appreciative notice : "Hear us, my lord : thou art a mighty prince among us : in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead ; none of us shall withhold from thee

his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead." How these incidental strokes of pathos attest the oneness of the human heart! Circumstances test the true quality of men. Irreverence in the presence of grief is an infallible sign of the deepest degeneracy: it marks the ultimate deterioration of the human heart. On the other hand, to be chastened by sorrow, to be moved into generous pity and helpfulness, is to show that there is still something in the man on which the kingdom of Jesus Christ may be built. Never despair of any man who is capable of generous impulses. Put no man down as incurably bad, who will share his one loaf with the hungry, or give shelter to a lost little one. Poor and crude may be his formal creed, very dim and pitifully inadequate his view of scholastic theology; but there is a root in him which may be developed into much beauty and fruitfulness. For this reason, I cannot overlook the genial humanity and simple gracefulness of this act of the Hittites.

Man's final requirement of man is a grave. We may go down to the grave in one or two very different ways. Our grave may be respected, or it may be passed by as a dishonoured spot. We may live so as to be much missed, or we may live so as to leave the least possible vacancy. Whichever way it be, we should remember that there is no repentance in the grave, the dead man cannot obliterate the past.

Abraham mourned for Sarah. What then? Consecration to God's purposes does not eradicate our deep human love; say rather that it heightens, refines, sanctifies it! Every father is more a father in proportion as he loves and serves the great Father in heaven. We should be on our guard against any system of religion or philosophy that seeks to cool the fervour of natural and lawful love. It may be very majestic not to shed tears; but it is most inhuman, most ungodly. We have heard of Abraham mourning, of David crying bitterly, of the Saviour allowing his feet to be washed with a sinner's tears, and of Jesus Christ weeping; but who ever heard of the devil being broken down in pity or mournfulness? Christianity educates our humanity, not deadens it; and when we are in tears it helps us to see through them nearly into heaven.

Gen. xxiv. 66.

"And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done."

REBEKAH: DOMESTIC LIFE.

INSTEAD of looking at the beautiful chapter before us as showing only how a wife was chosen for Isaac, look at it as a story full of family interest, and bright with many points of general human feeling. Of course the choice of a wife for Isaac is the one great fact in the chapter; but, without making its importance secondary, we may gather lessons about common household life which will touch a very large circle of sympathy and action.

The first figure is very touching: an old man, a wintry beard falling upon his breast, but a strange glow of fire in his eyes, which tells of life that winter cannot reach; a servant before him, God above him, and angels waiting! And the subject is the wedding of a son! Inconvenient jesting, or unseasonable laughter, there is none; there is a deep, solemn, hopeful joy; and even if there be a touch of melancholy about the picture, it is the sweet pensiveness without which rapture would be but a flippant and perishable delight.

We cannot but be deeply touched by the action of Abraham, "old, and well stricken in age." His eldest servant was a man who ruled over all that he had, and to this honest man Abraham said, "Thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac." A beautiful thing for a father to be interested in his son's wife! Not selfishly and meanly, not taking up an obstinate position and showing how ugly it is possible for an old man to be; but religiously, nobly, hopefully, with tender affection and genuine joy of heart. The good old Hebrews seemed to do all the ordinary work of life with such a broad and massive religiousness! They lived so thoroughly in the consciousness of all that was grand and prophetic in their history, that when they wanted to do any new thing they seemed to stop a great golden chariot by the road-side and to pick up the thing that was waiting there. See if this was not so in Abraham's case. Does he introduce the matter to his servant's attention in a light and gossiping way? Is he at all offhanded

in his manner or tone? Far from it! Hear him: "The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee." How solemn the tone! The thing so well begun will surely be well done. We are apt to let our history slip away from us so fast, that, in facing the future, we have no inspiration of memory, no rock that took long in building, and never can be shaken down. It was so different with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! The first line and the last of their religious recollection were vivid in brilliance, and the very next thing they were going to do was taken up as a link belonging to a long golden chain, fashioned by the hand of God. The choice of a wife for Isaac was no casual incident; it was not something standing apart from the main line of his history, and something therefore which might be left to Isaac's unassisted thought and arrangement; it stood as a part of a promise; it was a clause in a solemn covenant; it was as sacred as prayer, and as joyous as a morning psalm. Why should we diminish our own sense of God's care in our life, by always regarding the patriarchal history as something never to be repeated—a miracle once for all, without counterpart in our life? God is *our* Father; our life is precious in his eyes; our family is part of the King's garden; and everything about us is dear to him. Get hold of that idea; store it in your hearts as a sacred faith, and you will know that the very hairs of your head are all numbered, and that the angels are with you as they were with Abraham.

The next picture disclosed in the scene is that of the angel and the servant. The angel went before and the servant followed after. And when he came unto Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor, the servant spake unto the Lord in prayer. Look at the preparation,—Abraham planning, the servant praying, the angel advancing, the camels kneeling down at the well, the presents all stored ready for distribution. It is like the preparation of a holy altar! This (if we were religious enough to give things their right names) is really what is happening in our own time. The angel of the Lord is still living, and he ministers variously and lovingly in human life. Of course we do not allude to him by name. We now talk of mental impressions, convictions, coincidences,

inexplicable feelings, and divers impulses, but the angel we never name. This is a beautiful example of God's indirect way of working. Why does not the angel speak audibly to Rebekah? Why should there be two servants, the winged one in the air, and the common one in charge of the camels? It is by this double ministry that providences are confirmed; the mental impression and the outward fact correspond; the light of a new hope arises in the heart; and at the same time the star appears to guide the way. All through life we see this principle of mediation, or double ministry, at work: in the conversion of men, in the determination of destiny, in things common, and in things unusual,—you find everywhere the invisible action of the Spirit, the imperfect action of human workers. You feel a strong impulse to do some good thing: it is the angel troubling with Divine energy the stagnation of your heart; you are deeply impressed; it is the finger of God writing his purpose on the soul. Look out, and you will find the opportunity and the service corresponding to your mental convictions or spiritual impulses: you will see, in fact, what you have dreamed in parable.

In this way you will see many curious coincidences in human life, things that are more easily explained upon religious than upon merely secular grounds. How you met certain persons, how they came to be at such a place at such a time, how you happened to drop a certain word or give a certain hint, why you should have gone just then and not at any other time; these things, and a thousand others, will puzzle and bewilder you, on merely secular principles; but if you believe in God, in his presence, care, and providence in human life, a great light will fall upon the whole outline of your history, and you will own with adoring wonder that God has been directing and establishing you all your days. Life without a religious interpretation is a pitiful tragedy; life with a religious interpretation may be a tortuous road ending in a quiet and blessed heaven.

Gen. xxv. 8.

"Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years ; and was gathered to his people."

THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM.

NOW that he is gone we may be able to get a clear view of his whole character, and to see how one part looks in the light of another. It is almost impossible to be just to any living man who is doing a great work, because we see his imperfections, we are perhaps fretted by the manner in which he does it, and we are not quite sure that he may not even yet spoil it by a blunder or a crime. But when he has laid down his tools, and left his work for the last time, we may look quietly at the whole character, stretching clear through from youth to old age, and form a sound opinion of its quality and value.

Abraham is by far the greatest man we have met with in these studies, and his greatness is our difficulty, because we are apt to judge him by ourselves. That, indeed, is the difficulty of reading all the best biography ; we think what *we* should have done, and if the hero did not act just as we should have acted, it is very seldom that we give him credit. In some respects Abraham was the first great traveller in the world ; and his difficulty in travelling was the greater because he did not leave home to gratify any curiosity or whim of his own, but in obedience to a spiritual influence which bore him forward by a mighty impulse which he could hardly put into words. We should call a man who acts to-day as Abraham acted thousands of years ago, a fanatic ; we believe in a respectable and decorous Providence ; not in the God who drives us before the breath of a storm and makes us helpless under the spell of an irresistible inspiration. And we should doubt a man who acted like Abraham all the more because he did not get the very thing which he said God had promised to him before he left home. That would be fatal to any man's claim to having been directed of God nowadays. We judge the providence by the prize. If you *succeed*, then you have been Divinely guided ; if you *fail*, then you have either "not asked or else you have asked amiss." If you are invited from one church to another, as pastor, your wisdom in accepting the invitation

will be judged by the congregations you gather: if you fill the pews and have to enlarge the building, people will say, "You can have no doubt *now* that God sent you"; but if the hearers be few and poor, the same people will tell you that you have missed "your providential way." Judged by this standard of (miscalled success, Abraham's migration is the greatest blunder in the pages of religious history. It was a failure. Canaan was promised to him, and he never got a foot of it! Surely, then, a respectable and commercial piety may fairly call him a mistaken man, an amiable enthusiast, a clairvoyant dreamer who mistook a morning mist for a great estate. I wish, therefore, to learn from Abraham's character the right way of judging Providence; to learn from a Jew how to be a Christian! The rough and ready way of stating this case is: Abraham went out from his kindred and his father's house to get a land that God would show him; Abraham did not get that land, but actually "sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country," and was buried in a grave which he had to buy; it is clear, therefore, that he mistook a dream for a reality, a mirage for a landed property, and he was punished for his selfish ambition. I fear that this notion of God's providence is not unknown amongst ourselves; that we think nothing is heavenly but success; and that it never enters our minds that God's way may lie through the dreary region of hunger and loss, pain and sorrow, weakness and death, and that failure itself may be a sign of God's presence and care in our life.

Abraham's case shows that God may have fulfilled a promise when he had apparently broken it; and that God's promises are not to be measured by the narrowness and poverty of the letter. God promised Abraham and his seed a place or land called Canaan, and yet Abraham and his seed never held the land; Abraham "sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in the tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise"; he had "none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet God promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child." Now, this brings us, so to speak, into close quarters with God's providence, and Abraham's character becomes a medium through which we learn Divine lessons. *Abraham suffered for us.* It is beautiful

beyond expression to see how the true idea dawned upon the mind of the man of faith, that is to say, how he got from the letter to the spirit and saw God's meaning at last. When he came out of the land of the Chaldeans he had a very small notion of his future, but as he went on and on, from Charran, building his altar and pitching his tent, his eyes pierced beyond the little land of Canaan, and "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." He could not have taken in the grandeur of that idea at first. It was too spiritual for him. He must have real land, real stones, real possessions of divers kinds, and by-and-by there would break upon his mind the higher light; these things would show their own worthlessness as mental supports and tonics, and he would let them slip out of his hands that he might become a citizen of "a better country, that is, an heavenly," "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," and the literal Canaan would cease to have a single charm for a man that had seen "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." I beg you not to let this point slip, or you may "charge God foolishly": you may say, "God promises one thing and gives another, therefore he disappoints and distresses the believer of his promises,"—now, that is true as to the first part, and untrue as to the second, for it is in evidence in all the volumes of history and personal experience that God's way of fulfilling his promises always astonished with glad surprise the very persons who at first saw nothing but the letter, and grasped nothing but the common meaning of the word. God's promises are not broken, they are enlarged and glorified. The *receivers themselves* are satisfied, are overwhelmed with thankful amazement, and, instead of complaining that the letter has not been kept, they say, "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think"; and so deep is this impression that they have said, and are saying every day, the things that are seen by the natural eyes are not worthy to be compared with the glories that shine on the eyes of the heart. Now this I hold to be the explanation of the difficulty arising from the supposed discrepancy between the promise and its fulfilment. It is fulfilled beyond all expectation. The answer is as a river which overflows the channel of the promise.

Your little boy is five years old : promise him that if he will learn such and such lessons he shall have the finest rocking-horse in the world when he is fifteen : I can easily imagine him seizing his lessons with great earnestness ; at five a rocking-horse seems the finest of prizes ; the child works, and reads, and learns (the figure of the rocking-horse still being before his imagination), but as five becomes seven, and seven grows into nine, and nine enlarges into twelve, and the mind strengthens and brightens by the very work which was to bring the prize, the rocking-horse goes down in value, until, at fifteen, the intelligent, well-trained, glad-hearted youth declines the very Canaan which he so eagerly started to win, and is almost insulted if you name to him the promised prize. Why does he decline it ? Because he has got something so much better : he has got information, culture, discipline, habits of reading and observation, and these very things which he had no idea of getting when he started have actually wrought in him a proper contempt for the very prize that was promised.

So I see Abram starting from the land of the Chaldeans with a promise of getting another land. At first he thinks much about it. He wonders how long it is, and how wide, and how rich in wells and thick pastures, and many a long dream he has about the country far away ; travel tries him ; little disappointments trouble his daily life ; sorrow comes ; death overshadows him ; great judgments come down from heaven ; a solemnity grows upon his heart as he sees the seasons rise, flourish, and die, and life run its little round ; many a word God speaks to his heart ; he learns something of the greatness of manhood ; new possibilities disclose themselves ; unusual aspirations give a higher dignity to his prayers, and his soul almost unconsciously enters into new alliances and companionships, until at last he declares plainly, even in Canaan itself, that he seeks a country, a better country, a richer Canaan, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. It is thus our manhood grows. "When I was a child, I thought as a child : but when I became a man, I put away childish things." I needed a *promise* suitable for a *child* ; I sigh for a *fulfilment* worthy of a *man*.

When the young man started in business he probably set bee for his mind the idea of twenty years' service, a modest

competence, and long years of leisure, a Canaan easily gained and easily held. As he went forward the very effort he was required to make evolved new opportunities, new habits, and new ambitions, until his first notion became ridiculous even to himself. Thus we are led on. First, that which is natural; afterward, that which is spiritual. To begin with we must have something to look at and to touch; by-and-by our better nature will be awakened, and spiritual meanings will be realised. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be" in spiritual elevation and desire; in our meaner selves we think that the earthly will be enough, but in our better moments we shall earnestly desire our house from heaven. The young lad whose pocket money is fourpence per month quite longs for the time when he will be called upon to pay the income-tax. He says he will be only too glad to pay the tax when he gets the income. In due time he obtains the income, but I listen in vain for any special gratification in the matter of the tax. The veteran servant who has received a gift of honour from his admirers, tells them that much as he values the silver and the gold, he prizes the love which gave them infinitely more. This is the same principle; it is the spiritual absorbing the material. The principle may be applied to heaven itself. The young Christian thinks of heaven as a magnificent collection of all the finest things he has ever heard of—of harps and trumpets, of gardens and fountains, of processions and banners, of crowns and thrones; as he grows in holy life he sees that something better must be meant; as he gets nearer and nearer the promised land he cares less and less for the magnificence which once satisfied him; and at the last he sees all the heaven he needs in being "for ever with the Lord."

These are beautiful words as showing one side of Abraham's character; "And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah." I am not aware that those names are thus united in any other transaction. Abraham never ceased to care for Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman, the wanderer; and Ishmael showed how he valued his father's care by thus uniting with Isaac in the last act of filial love. How true is it that sometimes relatives only meet one another at funerals! For years they may never speak to each other, but some cold, sad day they set out on a journey to one common grave. "Abraham

gave all that he had unto Isaac," yet Ishmael went to the funeral ! Isaac and Ishmael met over their father's dead body, and then probably separated for ever. Ishmael might have had hard feelings as he stood so near the bones of Sarah : thought of his mother and of that day when she and he went forth into the wilderness. Some recollections cut us very keenly, and even make us furious with resentful anger. It was surely not so with Ishmael. The wilderness had told well upon him. He was not hardened by hardship. He was a giant and a true king, and his eye took in wide sweeps of things, and thus helped his soul towards large and noble judgments.

Abraham is our father, too, if we believe, for he is "the father of the faithful." If we blame him for aught of short-coming or misdeed, we blame ourselves, for we are more to be reproached than he. Abraham lived in the twilight, we live in the full noon ; Abraham stood alone, we are members of the general assembly and Church of the first-born, with throngs of friends around us, and blessed memories and inspirations. Let us cultivate the pilgrim spirit. Let us "declare plainly that we seek a country." Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. Bind the sandals, grasp the staff, tarry briefly everywhere, and though faint, be evermore pursuing, content with nothing less than heaven.

Gen. xxvi. 17-33.

THE WELLS OF ISAAC:

IF you look at single verses of this chapter you might suppose that Isaac was a very excellent man. If you look at other verses in the same chapter you will find that he was guilty of express and abominable falsehood. Is it not the same chapter which records your life?—mine? Our life is not one whole chapter in a solid paragraph, to be read through as if it were but one great sentence : our life-chapter is broken up into verses, punctuated sometimes very strangely and surprisingly. To pick out a single verse from that chapter and say "That is the man" might make us too good ; shall I add that to pick out another kind of verse from the same chapter and to say "That is the man" might perhaps hardly do justice to the roundness and the inner-

most quality and meaning of our character? Believe me we are not quite so good as some little verse in our own life-chapter would seem to imply, and you will believe me when I say that, notwithstanding the blackness of some stinging verses—the horrible blasphemy—we did not altogether mean it exactly as it might be read by an elocution that was determined against us. Blessed be Heaven! it is not the business of any man to read my life-chapter, nor my business to read any other man's life-chapter. God will read all the writing—a wondrous Reader: skilled in all the holy cunning of love which gets meanings and suggests emphases, and reads up into accents quite out of the way of mere scholarly reading and literary articulation. Jesus Christ has given us an instance of his way of reading, and when he read the chapter to the very people who were supposed to have dictated it by their action, they said "Well, well." That will be so in the last great reading. Comfort one another with these words. Great meanings will come out of little actions, as great trees come out of little bulbs. Spoken by the Lord, our life's speech will expand into a noble eloquence, and throb with inexpressible meanings, and heaven will begin in the surprise with which we shall listen to the testimony of him who is above our life. Never exclude the other side of the picture. Let us be frank with ourselves. Some of our neglects may be turned into impeachments; some of our omissions may be charged upon us as high treason against the law of love and trust and obligation. We do not recognise them; we have a way of over-leaping certain spaces in the life, and of referring to some things in whispers; but our neglects may be the beginning of our hell. Suppose we are not guilty of direct, overt, and nameable crimes,—we may be charged with omissions—you ought to have done this beauteous deed of charity; you ought to have spoken that tender word of comfort; you ought to have visited such and such solitude and turned it into sweet companionship. These are the things we make nothing of. Because we are not guilty of murder, therefore we think we are not guilty of heart-slaughter. God will read the life-chapter at last, and in the reading of it he will divide the universe of humanity into heaven and hell.

What a detestable man Isaac is when he tells lies to the king

of the Philistines! Then he goes out well-hunting, as if he deserved to find water in the earth; and, secondly, calls the wells after the names which his father Abraham had given them. What contradictions we are!—telling lies to a living king, and sentimentally honouring a dead father. Mean man! has Isaac left any posterity upon the earth? Do we look upon him as an ancient character, or as a modern instance? We are doing the same thing ourselves in some form or way. What if in the very middle of our life there be just one great black lie, and lying outside two or three beautiful touches of sentiment—quite a skill in the drawing up of epitaphs, and quite a tearful and watery way of talking about old fathers and old associations? All these speeches make the lie the worse; when we see how little good we might be and might do, it aggravates the central evil of the life into overpowering and intolerable proportions. We never know how profane is the blasphemy until we catch ourselves in prayer. To think that the tongue blackened by that profanity could have also uttered that same prayer! Why, in the contrast is a new accusation and a fresh reproach. But let us follow Isaac in his well-digging. Man must have wells; man must go out of himself and pray to God in digging, if he will not pray in liturgy and uttered hymn and psalm in words. God lays his hand upon us at unexpected places: if we will not fall down upon our knees, we must still bend the proud back and dig in his earth in quest of water. At best we are dependants, seekers, always in quest of something which another hand alone can give us. Oh that men were wise! that in these true and inevitable providences we might see the beginning of inward and spiritual revelations, and that knowing the goodness of God in the gift of water and of bread, we might proceed to know that ineffable goodness which expressed itself in sacrificial and propitiatory blood. From the lower to the higher, I charge thee to go, or else thy reasoning is a base sophism and the beginning of an awful crime. Isaac's men are now in a little valley through which the summer torrent poured, and it is very dry, and they must seek water, and they dig and find the water of which they were in quest, and then the herdmen of the Philistines said, "The water is ours"; and Isaac called the well *Strife*—*Esek*. We have dug that well ourselves; you have dug it in your business. Do

not suppose that men can find wells and be let alone. If Isaac's men had found nothing but dust, the men of Gerar would never have spoken to them. It is what you find that excites the surprise, the envy, the opposition of those who are not in sympathy with you. If you sometimes take that view of life, it may help you. If you had plunged your hand into the wild wind and plucked nothing out of it, your unkindest neighbour would not have spoken harshly about you ; he would have been rather pleased on the whole, and have treated himself to some new little luxury ; but when you bring back news of wells, and mines, and fruit-fields, and harvests plentiful and golden, and then have to enter into contest, do not look so much at the contention as at the prize : take the broader, brighter view of things, even the divine aspect of life's reality, and remember that all life is—after all, through all—a contest, a strife, a controversy, a sharp friction.

Isaac took the right course : he said, "Pass on and find another well." His men "dug another well," and the men of Gerar "strove for that also : and he called the name of it *Sitnah*"—*Hatred*. Who can bear two successes ? One might have been forgotten, but repetition is unpardonable. At first, mere strife, contradiction, contention of a worthy sort ; and then a settled frown, the awful disgust, the virulent detestation. To that pass may human feeling be driven ! Let us beware of it : it hinders prayer, it beclouds heaven, it dries up the beautiful well that springs in the middle of our own heart ; or it turns the crystal water rising from that human fountain into a kind of poison. Hatred and love cannot live in the same house. Hatred may seem to expend itself upon the outer object, but in reality it is hurting you more than it is hurting your victim ; it takes the angel out of you, it slays your very soul ; it chokes the sweet song in your throat, and turns all the milk of human kindness into gall and bitterness. Hatred distorts the countenance into unbeautiful and hideous gnarls ; hatred takes out of the voice its frank trustfulness and sympathetic music ; hatred takes away the appetite, so that a man's bread becomes sour in his own mouth ; hatred gives the hand a wrong twist in writing letters of love and friendship, so that the readers can see between the lines indications of an unhappy and undivine condition of mind. *Hatred*

does not expend itself upon the victim : it expends itself in the ruin of the soul of the man who hates. He who hates cannot pray ; he who hates can offer no sacrifice upon God's altar that shall be accepted. If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and then rememberest that thou hatest thy brother and hast not forgiven him, or hast been unkind to him, run back, and when thou hast spoken the true and noble word to thy brother, return, and thy mouth shall be opened in prevailing prayer, and God will say Amen in the uptaking of thy sacrifice and placing it in heaven.

Isaac had a sweet nature, too : he was not turned sour by all this, as some of us might have been. The worst issue that these arrangements can produce is an issue of souring the mind of the sufferer, turning him away from social paths as a disappointed and wounded man. Brother, I would I could speak comfortingly to thee herein ! Surely, having dug two wells, and been driven away from both of them, there might be some excuse for a little pouting of the lip and hanging down of the head, and a groaning out of bitter words against men. Here I can but preach where I would gladly practise ; but the right preaching would tell both you and me that, having been driven away from two wells, dug by our own industry, and secured, as we think, under God's blessing, by our own skill, we are not justified in complaining impiously ; we ought to go straight on, and try to find another well. It is weary work. I do not like people to tell me in a jaunty and cheerful voice that I ought to carry my griefs and disappointments in an airy manner ; I prefer the solemn tone that assures me that the grief is noted, is weighed, and is regarded as very serious ; but that, after all, the world is bigger than any part of it ; the globe is larger than any section of its crust—the Lord reigneth, and perhaps I am only driven away from this place that I may find a larger ; the disappointment which I now mourn may be the beginning of largess and fortune and benediction and heaven. I will up and go and dig again. Yes, that is the right preaching ; and whoever alters his tone, the preacher must never alter his ; whilst he stands in his pulpit, with God's book open before him, and the roof of the sanctuary over his head, he must speak the great word—ay, even though in speaking it he be pleading against himself, and convicting his practical life of a breach of every word he has spoken before the bar of God.

Our prayer must be right, whatever our life is; our speech must have in it the right tone and music, whatever our poor doing may be. It is our duty to lift up the life to the prayer, and the doing to the speech; meantime, prayer to God and speech to man must be of the royalest kind, imperially pure, inexorable in righteousness, most tender in charity, most radiant in hopefulness.

The leader being of sweet temper, the men went forward—"removed from thence and digged another well; and for that the Philistines strove not." That is the way to wear out an enemy. Hatred does give in sometimes; black, hideous hatred, does sometimes exhaust itself. The Philistine herdmen strove no more, so Isaac said, "We will call this well *Rehoboth*"—Room, space to live in; a place to stand upon. There is a place for every one of us, could we but find it; some have a long, long search in quest of the right place. Do not let us who stand in circumstances of comfort be the men to chide and sting such with reproaches; what have we that we have not received? It is easy for men who are in great prosperity to sneer at poor strugglers, against whose faces every door is shut and locked and bolted; let us show our refinement by abstaining from vulgar criticism on the difficulties of other men; let us show our gratitude by our sympathy, and let us prove our strength by the moderation of its exercise. The well you have found is God's gift: your beautiful home, your happy family, your prosperous business. You did not perhaps come to that estate of contentment and enjoyment all at once. Remember the first well you dug, and what a fight you had over it; the second, and how hatred turned you out of the place; and, remembering your own difficulties, have pity upon the fruitless exertions of other men. That may be the beginning of piety; to take a right view of such circumstances may be the dawn of prayer. I shall not despair of you if you have one kind, hopeful word for men who are still at the well of Strife, or at the fountain of Hatred.

After that another well was dug, and Isaac said, "We will call it *Sheba*"—an oath, a covenant: a settled and unchangeable blessing. So the course of life runs—Strife, Hatred, Room, striking of the hands in holy covenant. Happy is the consummation; it is possible to us all under the providence of God. It is a surprising thing that we should have all this friction to pass through,

if we look at some aspects of our character ; but if we look at other aspects, it is surprising that we have so little discipline to encounter and to endure. Looking at certain aspects of our nature and position we say, "Is it not surprising that we should be called upon to endure all this?" Thus we mistake ourselves for ill-used men of piety. The right speech would be : "This comes of that lie I told the Philistines ; God is hurting me now for that base falsehood ; this is John the Baptist risen from the dead ; this is God's ghost sent to make 'night hideous.' Thanks be unto God that the discipline is so little, so attempered, so adapted to my weakness. When I remember the great lie, the awful deed, the plucking of fruit from the interdicted tree, the treachery, and then think that I have only been driven from two wells, how good is God ! I will join the house of Aaron, and say, His mercy endureth for ever." That is the view I would take of my own life-course, and therefore would exhort other men to follow the same method of judgment. We are not so deeply pious, so supremely holy, that God ought to spare us the prick of a pin, or the thrust of a thorn. Dwelling upon one side of our excellences, we might wonder that God should allow one touch of the goad to disturb us ; then we are self-deceivers. I will reckon up the prayers I ought to have prayed but never spoke, the deeds I have done that I ought not to have accomplished ; I will reckon up all neglects, all offences against God and man, all the weaknesses of my character ; and, adding these up, the wonder is that God has not struck me through and through—not merely punctured me with a thorn here and there, but struck me with his seven lightnings, and utterly consumed me from the face of the earth. The trial has been severe, the disappointment has been acute ; looked at from various standpoints we may have had too much to bear, but enclosing ourselves within the solemnity of God's holiness and our own deeds, we cannot but wonder that the men should have been men and not wolves that, springing from hidden places, might have devoured us because of our unrighteousness.

Then there is another and higher aspect. It is not necessary that a man's parents should have sinned that he should be born blind, nor is it necessary to find a crime in order to explain a suffering. This is the course of Jesus Christ himself. He came unto his own, and his own received him not ; he came again, and

he was despised and rejected of men ; he came again, and he is finding room ; he is coming again, and he will realise the oath that he shall have the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. He was made perfect through disappointment and cruelty and wrong, through injustice and suffering. Both sides of this question, therefore, must be carefully looked at, and each man must determine for himself in the secrecy of his own consciousness to which side he ought to look for comfort or for warning.

Speaking of wells, I like the word ; it is full of music, there is a splash in it as of the water which it represents. "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst ; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." O ye poor well-diggers, digging where there is no water, how long will ye turn your back upon the right way, and be as gods unto your little selves ? Why eat stones for bread ? Why dig where there is no stream to be found ? "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money." Whosoever will may come. We cannot explain these words : they are not to be treated exegetically, after the manner of analysis or vivisection ; but they cannot be uttered sympathetically without touching something in us that tells us we are not earth-born or time-imprisoned, but are made of God, and are meant for eternity.

Gen. xxvi. 34, 35.

"And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite : which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah."

THE MARRIAGE OF ESAU.

THIS is not a personal matter, beginning and ending with Esau, Judith, Bashemath, Isaac and Rebekah : this is a little piece of the universal history—a line or two taken almost at random from the daily tragedy of social intercourse and experience. To think that a man's *age* is set down as an element in

the moral reckoning of his life ! Esau was forty years old when he did this. A sin is aggravated, sometimes, by the age of the sinner. We excuse the young ; we try to account for them ; we assign a certain period of young life within which it seems to be—not right—but natural that certain seeds should be sown and that certain influences should come and go. If we can say, regarding the accused one, “He was but eighteen” ; “Certainly he was under twenty,” we touch something in the human heart which answers the appeal on behalf of the young. We do not lower the standard of righteousness ; we do not accommodate the terms of virtue so as to involve in any complacent manner or degree the actions of vice ; yet far away back in the heart we say, “He was but a child, he will learn better ; give him time, and all may yet come right.” But Esau was forty years old when he did this. Some men learn nothing by age ; they are only forty years old on the books of the registrar : they are no age at all in the books of wisdom. Forty years old ! Some men are patriarchs by that time, and other men have not begun to know that they are alive in a responsible state in society. Age is a variable term. You must find out the spiritual quality of a man before you can determine with moral precision what age he is, and almost the degree of responsibility that attaches to him. But do not excuse yourselves too easily. When you do the sin, think of the age ; think of everything that can set forth the action in its most solemn and expressive meaning ; think of the fine day, the insulted sunshine, the offended flowers, the summer blasphemed against ; yea, if there is one thing you can think of that will show what the reality of the deed is, keep it steadily before the mind for the sake of its possibly restraining moral influence.

Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith and Bashemath—and there the matter ended. No : matters do not end so. The next verse contains part of the consequence : “Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.” You cannot shut up your sin within the four corners of your own life, or house, and say, “What matters it to anybody beyond ?” Sin has consequences. A motion made in the middle of the lake sends its palpitations to the shore. We do not think of this. You do not know sufficiently the effect of any unhappy, unwise,

or unrighteous thing you do. You did not see your mother put her hand to her failing eyes to dry out the tears when she heard that you had made that moral slip; when she met you the tears had all gone, but there was a significant redness you might have interpreted, if you had not already put out the eyes of your own heart. Poor young fool! you have forgotten the old folks at home; you are making the old man ill, you are doubling his age, you are battering down his very last little pleasure; and as for your mother, you have taken a thousand lives out of her; only a woman who is a mother could have survived the butchery. Do not yield to the wicked sophism that what you do nobody has anything to do with. We have a right to do with everything that is done. I have a right to stop any man who is cruelly treating any beast upon the street that cannot defend itself. It is my beast he strikes. We have the right of criticism in relation to actions that touch the general human heart, that interfere with the general moral temperature, and that involve the happiness or unhappiness, perhaps, of countless generations. You cannot do injury to yourself without in some way injuring the generation following: Actions are not solitary and uninfluential: they have relations to other actions and to influences simply innumerable and incalculable. I passed to-day a poor ill-shapen thing on the streets, and watched him as he hobbled his uneven way down the road. Was he to blame for the misshapeness, the deformity, the ungainliness? What history was there in that decrepitude!—a history stretching back twenty, fifty years and more; and there he—personally innocent thing—was carrying the burden of life-long guilt on the part of his progenitors. What a sacred thing is life! What an unbuilt temple, so far as hands are concerned. But how shapely, how visible, how solemn to the eyes that can see it, and to the heart that can respond to its inner meanings!

Thus should the preacher bring from every quarter, points, circumstances, suggestions, facts, reflections, and possibilities which can shape his argument into a powerful and tremendous appeal which he shall lodge against the iniquity and the vileness of his age.

A sin does not confine itself to one line of punishment. Esau went against the law of his country and his people in marrying

Canaanitish women. What was the punishment? Endless, ubiquitous, complete. All heaven shuts itself against the violation of heaven's law. No star opens its door of light as if to guide the evil-doer: every star, contrariwise, takes up arms for its Creator, and denounces the doer of wrong. Esau was, in the first instance, alienated from his family. His father and mother did not want to see him as they used to do. They were not going openly to shut the door in his face, and say "You shall not come within these doors any more." The mother did not assume that violent form, but assumed consequences far more pathetic and in one sense far more terrible. A grief of mind is far greater sorrow than mere excitement of resentful temper. The mother still opened the door to the hunting son, but it did not go back with the old swing; the mother still looked upon that well-built, noble form, but she wished that the interior of his nature had been in this instance equal to the mould and fashion which nature had bestowed upon his physical frame. A wounded spirit who can bear? This alienation is not a matter of arms, and revenge, and bitter speeches, and reproaches, which ease the very heart that launches them upon its object; this was an instance of grief of mind, sorrow of heart, a wounded spirit for which there is no balm.

Esau committed an offence against organised society. He took the matter into his own hands, saying, "I know I am forbidden to marry into Canaanitish families, but I will marry when I please, where I please, how I please; I am a man, and I will stand upon my individual rights." Take care how you accept that reasoning! What are individual rights? Who is the individual? Is it the solitary unit that bears the name of one individuality? or is it the social unit, the sum total, the great humanity? Tell me one individual right. Have I any right to blaspheme? to assert myself at the expense of the feelings of others? to occupy more space than is due to me? Have I a right to shut my eyes when misery goes past my windows, that I may not see the bent and tearful figure, or be moved by the spectacle of distress? Have I a right to involve other people in my actions—to use their money, to prostitute their influence, to trade upon their credit which has never been given, to heap up riches to myself, without regarding the cry of the poor and the helpless? There are no such rights.

Wrong can never be right; selfishness can never be right; the man whose policy is figured upon the surface of one world only can never be right. Right is a large term, a most comprehensive expression. Our actions should be weighed and measured as to their social influence upon those near at hand and those who have yet to come.

Esau was not only alienated from his family and a rebel against the laws of his organised society: Esau forfeited his hereditary rights. That is a point to which our attention may not have been sufficiently called. The law of his land was: To marry a Canaanitish woman is to lose your primogeniture. Where now your many tears for Esau, the fainting hunter, who was taken at a disadvantage by his supplanting brother? Esau supplanted himself. To marry thus was to drop out of the entail, to forfeit position, and to commit hereditary suicide. It was *then* that Esau sold his birthright. How we have felt for him as an injured man! How often we have sentimentally said we prefer Esau to Jacob, the child of the mountains to the plain man dwelling in tents, the rough shaggy hunter to the hairless man who stayed at home! It was too bad of Jacob to treat his brother so. Find out the roots and beginnings of things, and you will always discover that a man is his own supplanter: his own enemy. You will find far back—ten years ago, twenty, and more, yea, a quarter of a century—that a man did something which has been following him all the time. When the crises come that the public can look at, they pity him within the four corners of the visible crisis itself: they do not know how judgment has been tracking the man, watching him with pitiless, critical eye, waiting for its turn to come. We read over such little verses as these as though they were related to an ancient anecdote, and have really no immediate concern to the public of our own century. We come upon a second line, and say, "Poor Esau! that was too bad!" Let us be just! No man can injure you so much as you can injure yourself. If you have not injured yourself you may defy the world; the world will come round you in due time. Keep substantially right—that is, right in purpose, right in motive, right in the centre of the mind; and slips and misadventures notwithstanding, God will have regard to the uppermost meaning of your life, and if you have been true to

him in the intent of your heart, the world cannot take your birthright, cannot break your spiritual primogeniture. An awful thing is this searching into the past. Long ago, in some unsuspected way, we sold our birthright. When we omitted, in the first instance, our religious duty, the whole battle was lost; when we shortened the prayer by two minutes, the birthright was gone; when we haggled with the enemy, instead of smiting him in the face with the lightning of God, our birthright passed from us; when we first lost standing in our mother's heart we slipped away from the hand of God. Verily, in such instances, the mother and the God are very close to one another. When the mother lets us go for moral reasons, I do not see how God can help us. She has a firm grip upon us; she is inventive in arguments on our behalf; she knows that we were not so much sinners as sinned against; she says that if we had been in another town we should not have misbehaved ourselves; she says that if our lodgings had been more comfortable our morals had been more complete; and, drying the very biggest, hottest tear out of her eyes, she is quite sure that if we knew all about it we should form a gentler judgment respecting the sin. When she gives up her evangelical logic that has no logic in it, but only one great outburst of motherly love, and says, "I cannot defend him any more," I do not see that Omniscience can invent another excuse. Many an Esau thinks himself an injured man, but forgets that long ago he sowed the seed with his own hand which he reaps to-day. There are not so many injured men, in the sense of men who have been really maliciously used and unrighteously wronged, as there might seem to be at the first blush of things. Life is wonderfully complicated and intertangled: it is not one thread or one straight line, but an infinite complexity, and God only can disentangle it and set in order its component and related parts. Long ago you broke a heart: do you suppose that event will be without influence, if unrepented of, during the remainder of your lifetime? I believe in ghosts of that kind—dropping poison into the wind; swiftly changing the glasses—ay, when we do but blink, the exchange is completed by a marvellous magic. The air is full of ghosts. You refuse a benefit—your bread shall choke you! You treated a law as if you had a right to trample it underfoot; you set at defiance the God who ordained

it, and the men to whose trust it was committed—you cannot think to do such things and hear no more about them. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

The law does not operate on one side only: it has its genial aspect and its happy outgoings. “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” “Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.” It is an impartial ordinance, a law with two sides moving with equalness of administration, of reward, and penalty, along all the lines of human life. Providence takes up our separate, and, apparently, unrelated acts, and makes a chain of them, and hangs it on the criminal in the sight of the universe; or Providence gathers up our separate and, apparently, unrelated acts, and finds heaven in them, saying to its own gracious heart, “Nothing but heaven can complete this process.” “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” When?—we do not know it: this is mistaken identity. “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” So the law is no one-sided ministry: it is impartial; but from its hell there is no escape, and they who have endeavoured to obey the law will find that heaven is the prepared consummation for a life spent in the Spirit of the Lord. How awful, how dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God! The subject has been severe with me: it has cleft me in twain; but it is right; I was wrong when I pitied Esau sentimentally; I ought to have known the case before judging it, and as for the wounds and bruises we have suffered, they have a moral explanation.

Now, preacher, say some other word: we cannot break up thus, or we shall take out with us broken hearts. I will say this word—not my own: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Can the blood of Christ act retrospectively, so as to take in all the black yesterdays? Every one of them. Is there any text that speaks upon this matter with a comprehensiveness all-inclusive? Yes. What is it? This is it: "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Parting with that word, we part under fair skies and with the music of a benediction singing in our hearts.

Gen. xxvii.

THE DECEPTION OF ISAAC.

THE well-known story of the deception of Isaac has been so often misinterpreted, that it may be well to endeavour to get the key and meaning of the whole narrative. It has been made a puzzle to tender consciences and imperfect and uncertain minds—not an intellectual puzzle only, for mysteries of that kind are innumerable; but a moral difficulty, a great and most painful wonder as to how such things could be, if not actually sanctioned, yet tacitly permitted, by the Judge of all the earth, whose distinguishing characteristic it is, in the estimation of holy minds, that he will assuredly do right. Let us endeavour to master the case, and to see exactly what amount of difficulty there is about it, and to show that this difficulty seems to be a necessary quality and incident in the development of all human life. It is often forgotten that Jacob was divinely appointed to be the inheritor of the blessing. The omission from the calculation or thought of that one fact is likely to lead not only to mental perplexity but to moral confusion. You find the proof of the assertion in Genesis xxv. 23. The Lord said unto Rebekah, in view of the birth of her children, "The one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." The mystery, therefore, is Divine. The commentator cannot help us here; the light is too strong for his eyes. This is the mystery of to-day, in our own house, in our own consciousness, in the whole circle of our experience, observation, and knowledge. Read the solemn words again: "The one people shall be stronger than the other people." Is that only a forecast, or is it a sove-

reign appointment? Is it an accident, or a fiat? The mind instantly says, Why should one people be stronger than any other people? But there is the fact. Were there no Bible the facts would still be there, plaguing the mind, challenging the imagination, and tempting the moral nature. "And the elder shall serve the younger." Why this inversion of all presumably natural methods? But there is the fact. We might deny the sovereignty in theory, but there it is in actual history—not the history that stands centuries away from us, and by its very distance in time becomes mythological; but the history of our own little life and our own small household. We cannot explain it. We see the mystery, and if we use it wrongly, it will but add to the confusion of our life; if we accost it obeisantly, as we might accost a visitant from the upper world, a tenderer solemnity will cover our life, a holier influence will lift up our souls to a bolder prayer. We shall do injustice to ourselves if we stumble at such mysteries: in the meantime, when the day is nearly all darkness, with just a glint of light here and there in the murky gloom, we shall do well to stand still, wonder, and remit the case to another occasion where we shall have more light and more time. In all life there is a kind of groping after destiny—a dumb consciousness that we are being called in this or that direction. The voice says, "Samuel"! and we rise and go to our old friends under the dream that they have called for us. Our old friends were deep in sleep: they knew not that a voice had fallen upon our ears, even the voice from on high; so that they slept on in peacefulness and in unconsciousness. A marvellous feeling is this pressure towards a given direction. We may not want to go in that special direction; but it seems to us as if we could not resist the influence that is bearing us with gracious violence in the line of a certain goal. We cannot calculate about it; we cannot take paper and pen and ink, and set down and add up reasons and bring them to the total of a logical conclusion. We are in the Spirit, we are caught up by the Spirit in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye: a trumpet has sounded and we are up where the morning is born. We do not understand the narrow and vulgar language of carnal reasoning and market-place reckoning, and calculation and conjecture. This is a mystery we must not omit from our view when we are looking out upon the

whole scheme of things ; nor must we regard it as a mystery belonging to other people. It is the presence of God in our own soul. This operation of destiny is seen in animal life, even of the lowest kind. Animals are born to their destiny : the ram butts before his horns are visible ; there is a scent in the nostril of the beast which stands to him in place of education and training ; the eye is made for the kind of work it has to do in the day-time or in the night season. From the very earliest throb of life there is some intimation of destiny had we but keenness of mind enough to see it. So in morals—and there the mystery becomes a pain : it does seem as if some people were made to be bad. The commentator must here hold his peace ; he can but feel the pressure of a great mystery and explain his feeling in imperfect terms. There is a difference of men in this respect. It is easier for some men to pray than for others to bow the knee in homage and look up to the heavens in expectation. We do not know what going to church costs some people in the way of pain and sacrifice of spirit. Others long for the church-day, the church bell, and the church door ; they are filled with joy on Sabbath mornings because the sanctuary will be opened and music divine will make the very air glad ; great revelations will be spoken by human tongues, and mighty prayers will make heaven's day brighter than the sun can make it ; the whole time shall be a succession of festival hours, and the heart shall keep high jubilee, not knowing sin, or sorrow, or pain, or weakness, because of the absorption of the soul in God. What it costs another man even to stand up as if he were singing God's praises cannot be told. There is more devil in him than divinity ; he does not want to pray ; if you persuade him to church, you cannot tell what a conquest you have won. In all this we have no explanation. The Bible does not make these mysteries, it recognises them and treats them in the only possible, the only just and wise way.

We find also this groping after destiny along intellectual lines. You plan a course of life for your sons—say they are six in number—but you really are doing what you have no right to do. Your business is to find out the way in which the child should go : then train up the child in the way in which he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it ; there is something

in destiny that confirms itself, something in consciousness and experience that says "This was the right way"; and the sunset shall be without a cloud. It is when parents seek to be the arbiters of their children's destiny that they set themselves up above God, and are therefore doomed to mortification and bitterness of soul. The Lord sends every life into this world for a point, a purpose, a destiny. Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? I will have no will but thine. What is the angel within me—painter, poet, merchant? Is mine to be a serving life, or a ruling one? Have I to give orders, or to obey them? Not my will, but thine be done. Then service is mastery, suffering is enjoyment, labour is rest.

Jacob was a destined man; Jacob was destined before he was born: what, then, was his error? Not in feeling, how mysteriously soever, the pressure of his destiny, but in *prematurely taking it into his own hands*. We must not force Providence. Is there not an appointed time to man upon the earth, in a much wider sense than in the sense of marking out the day of his death? Is there not a time for the rising of the sun and the going down of the same? Is there not a seed time in the year, as well as a harvest day? We are tempted to force Providence, thus to do the right thing in the wrong way, and at the wrong time. Right is not a question of a mere point; it gathers up into its mystery all the points of the case, so that it is not enough to be going in the right road; we must have come into that road through the right door, at the right hour, and by direct intervention and sanction of God.

It is tempting to natures like ours to help ourselves by trickery. We do like to meddle with God. Granted that the mother saw the religious aspect of this whole case, and knew the destiny of the boys, she had no right to force Divine Providence. "Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob." She knew not why. We cannot tell the genesis of our love; it is the mystery of being. What if she knew all the time, without being told in words—she could neither understand or explain—that Jacob would be the possessor of the first blessing? It is a difficult thing to have a secret entrusted to the soul, and yet not to tell that secret to others, or force its realisation by some little act of cunning and

knavery. We may go to church at the wrong time, and in the wrong way, and in the wrong spirit. It is not enough to be in the sanctuary : we must be there in the spirit of the house ; then the roof will be heaven, and the walls rich as the jasper of the skies. A rough thinking says this or that is the right way, and that is enough ; a correct, profound thinking says, "It is not enough to be substantially right : not only must you have a destiny to realise ; you must have also a process of destiny—a choice of equal value with destiny itself." Is not this an address to our innermost experience ? We will take things before the time. The vineyard is yours, every cluster of grapes is yours ; but do not touch one atom of fruit till the sun has wrought out his ripening ministry upon it. We may not touch even things that are our own until the right time comes. We know this in the field ; we know it in many mercantile transactions ; but it seems impossible for us to carry up that knowledge into the highest religious applications. We cannot wait, because we are imperfect ; we cannot stand still, because we are impatient ; and our impatience is but one phase of our ignorance.

There was an apparent justification of the action of Rebekah in the previous action of Esau already considered, namely : "Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite : which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah." The mystery of that act we have already considered, and it did seem to justify Rebekah in taking the administration of Providence partially into her own hands. We are not so pitiful of one another as God is pitiful of us. Rebekah would have Esau punished almost instantaneously because he had married out of the law. It is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of man. No doubt Esau had forfeited the primogeniture by this act of marrying the Canaanitish women ; no doubt he had become what the apostle centuries afterwards described as a "fornicator" ; no doubt he had turned the stream of the blessing into wrong lineal channels ; had there been no Divine sovereignty revealed even before that act he would by that act itself have forfeited his position in the family to which he belonged. How keen we are to make the faults of other people the reasons for excusing our own selfishness ! Was Rebekah moved

by the consciousness of destiny, or was she excited by the spirit of revenge? It is easy for us to mistake our revenge for religion. Some men *pray* out of spite; some men preach Christ out of envy; it is possible to build a church upon the devil's foundation, and to light an altar with the devil's fire. Whilst we have not spared Esau in our reading of his unlawful and unnatural marriages, we are bound now not to spare Rebekah in taking vengeance into her own hands. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." But we like to handle judgment; the hand itches to bestow upon the evil-doer some penalty or mark of discredit and degradation, on the plea that it is right to do so. What is right? It is impossible for us to know in that sense what "right" is, because it covers a space the eye cannot take in, and involves relations which defy imagination. Right—it is God's word; it is a word as large as God; it is a word that involves the very being of God; it is a term which shuts up God himself in a great necessity. What we have to do is to be patient, to be pitiful, to be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another; and when the pain is very keen—smarting like a sting of fire—and when the avenging weapon lies close at hand, and we feel that our arm has yet strength enough to inflict the deserved chastisement—it is then that we have to utter a prayer as from a cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"! This is religion, the religion of Christ, the wine of the true heart and sacrament; this is the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. It is an awful thing to be a child of special destiny. It sets a man away from the common lines of things, and makes him the butt of every archer, the sport of every fool; it brings upon him rapid judgments, sharp censures, biting criticisms; he is unmanageable, impracticable, unintelligible; he cannot be set in the straight line and current of things. Jacob was pre-eminently a destined child, a man with a special mark upon him: how he will come out of this we shall see; but God will be King and Master, and right shall be done. What, then, is to be our attitude under the consciousness of destiny, and under the suggestion of tempting events? Our attitude is to be one of perfect resignation. I do not mine own will; the works that I do are not my works, they

are the works of him that sent me ; I am not creator but creature ; I am not musician but instrument—not my will, but God's will be done. That being done, and being done in me and through me, I am in heaven ; I am part of the great sum-total of things—if not a pinnacle, yet a stone in the foundation ; if not a stone in the front walls, yet a stone in the inner lining—part of the temple, part of the holy building. God shall fix me where he pleases ; I will do nothing of myself ; be my future kingly, menial, triumphant, subservient, marked by a strength that never tires, or by a weakness that can scarcely pronounce its own name—it is nothing to me ; thy will, my God, be done. If I can say this with the soul, night shall have no darkness, day no cloud, death no sting, the grave no victory.

Gen. xxviii. 10-22.

THE DREAM OF JACOB.

ALTHOUGH Isaac lived sixty-three years after his deception, the remainder of the book of Genesis is occupied mainly with the history of Jacob and members of his family. It is wonderful to mark how suddenly, and sometimes almost contemptuously, men are displaced in history, and especially how some lives that opened in marvellousness pass away in commonplace or obscurity. So we cannot calculate the end from the beginning ; we cannot say, Given such a dawn and we shall have such a sunset, in human life. God seems to govern to a considerable degree by the element of surprise. Some suns we never see but in their setting ; others are never seen after a dazzling dawn, and others seem to shine all the day in cloudless lustre. The disposal of human life is with the Lord. Whether we rise or fall, whether we stand in the sun, like images to be gazed upon by a universe, or perish in the dust under our feet, the whole disposal of our life's lot and destiny is with the Lord. If we could believe that, we should never be in dejected spirits, we should never lose our strength through our want of faith. Isaac was a passive, rather than an energetic character. He was a despondent person. We thought he would have done otherwise ; but that misjudgment upon our part is no discredit to Isaac. We

have forgotten that the Lord reigneth. Sometimes we have wondered how the Lord would remove certain characters from the panorama of history. Has he not performed many a miracle herein? We have taxed our poor ingenuity to find methods by which certain men might disappear consistently with the harmony and music of things; and when we have failed, God has wrought out some miracle in providence which has astounded and yet completely satisfied us. We have seen the end and have been contented with it, as the soul is contented with a Divine revelation.

Now we begin with Jacob in earnest. He has, so far, escaped his brother's anger, which we thought to be just. Life is spared; but is the punishment evaded? The supplanter has apparently succeeded, whereas he has but begun the discipline of purification and refinement; he has gone at his mother's bidding; but, instead of having escaped God, he has run more consciously and completely into his hands. Herein also is a mystery, black as a night cloud, and yet not without some wealth of stars in all its appalling gloom. Jacob had undertaken this journey on his mother's advice, with the narrow policy of allowing Esau's anger to subside. She was minimising Providence into a local incident; she had undertaken too much. We cannot put our arms around the horizon; we are under seven feet at the most. Rebekah little knew how large a door she was opening, when she bade her son good-bye. She opened the universe! The supplanter has gone to meet Laban—he will meet the Lord before he meets Laban. God is waiting at the sleeping-place, and the revelation is already prepared. We require the darkness for the revelation of some things; we do not see the stars whilst the sun is blinding us; we speak flippantly of the day; we forget the night.

How goes the great tale of inward experience and consciousness? How beats the storm-music?—or is it almost silence? What is it? Notice how large conceptions come in upon the man's mind. Here is, first of all, *larger space*. Jacob saw heaven. Enlargement of space has a wonderful influence upon mind and spirit of every degree and quality. Go abroad; climb the hill, and leave your sorrow there. Take in the great revelation of space, and know that God's government is no local incident, or trifle which the human hand can take up and manage and

dispose of. We perish in many an intellectual difficulty for want of room. Things are only big because they are near; in themselves they are little if set up with the firmament domed above them, and numbered along with other things, which give proportion to all the elements which make up the circle of their influence. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things. You must bring your little flesh-wound against the mortal bruise of the universe; you must set up your little, little cross against the infinite Cross of Christ. It is possible for a man to live so long in his own house, as to live downwards towards the point of extinction; it is possible for a man to be so consumed with his own little business—for the greatest business of earth is but a noise and a spasm; there is nothing in the most stupendous business that is worthy of more than one moment's consideration, though we are agitated lest we miss the final post—it is possible for a man so to live within his own business as to go down into narrowness of thought, despair of soul, utter littleness and vapidness and nothingness. Go into the field, pass over the ways of the seas, pray when the stars are all ablaze like altars that cannot be counted, and at which an infinite universe is offering its evening oblation; take in more space, and many a difficulty which hampers and frets the mind will be thrown off, and manhood will take a bound forwards and upwards. Space is not emptiness; space is a possible Church.

Enlarging space never goes alone; it brings with it *enlarging life*. Jacob not only beheld heaven; he saw the angels coming down, going up—stirred by an urgent business. It is one thing to talk about the angels: it is another to see them. Blind bats! we seldom see any angel; mockers! we are fond of laughing at others who think they do. Herein we need not be too literal. The music is possible of realisation without any debasement of the reason. The great, stimulating, solemn thought is this: that there is more than is visible to the naked and most wakeful eye. There ought to be: we have all friends lost enough to make a heaven. You can treat them in either of two ways: like dead dogs that leave no mark in the universe, no name in all creation's ample bound: or you can think of them as released

persons, emancipated slaves singing songs, saints clothed in white raiment walking on hills of light, or flying or running on errands of mercy and love. Had there been no heaven of any kind without us, I repeat, we have lost enough of old companions to make a good strong heaven of. Let us not flippantly bid them good-bye, and think they have left nothing but a grave; amongst them are "The dead but sceptred monarchs who still rule our spirits from their urns." We must bear the reproach of believing in a heaven: we cannot consent to wither under the desolating negativism which deprives us of immortality.

Enlarging space brings enlarging life; enlarging life brings an *enlarging altar*. Jacob said, "Surely the Lord is in this place." We cannot enter into Jacob's meaning of that exclamation. He had been reared in the faith that God was to be worshipped in definite and specified localities. There were places at which Jacob would have been surprised if he had not seen manifestations of God. The point is, at the place where he did not expect anything he saw heaven; he saw some form or revelation of God. See how the greater truth dawns upon his opening mind, "Surely the Lord is in this place," and that is the very end of our spiritual education; to find God everywhere; never to open a rose-bud without finding God; never to see the days whitening the eastern sky without seeing the coming of the King's brightness; to feel that every place is praying ground; to renounce the idea of partial and official consecration, and stand in a universe every particle of which is blessed and consecrated by the presence of the infinite Creator. We have not yet attained this summit of education. We still draw a line between the Sabbath Day and the day that went before it; we have still a church and a market-place; still we vulgarly distribute the sum-total of things into Church and State. When God has wrought in us all the mystery of his grace, and reared us to the last fruition of wisdom possible below the skies, we shall know that there is no market-place, no State, no business, but one great Church; every speech holy and pure as prayer, every transaction a revelation of justice.

Immediately following these larger conceptions of things, we find a marvellous and instructive instance of the *absorbing power* of the *religious idea*. In Jacob's dream there was but one thought,

When we see God all other sights are extinguished. This is the beginning of conversion; this is essential to the reality of a new life. For a time the eye must be filled with a heavenly image; for a time the ear must be filled with a celestial message; a complete forgetfulness of everything past, and a new seizure and apprehension of the whole solemn future.

This is the very mystery and the very grace of regeneration. The mind is filled with God; all speech is resolved into one word—*God*, GOD, GOD. There will be reaction; there is menial work to be done, there are educative processes to be gone through and completed, and therefore the mind will throw off some measure of that complete absorption; but the influence of it will remain for ever. No man can go back from conversion; if he has gone back, he was never converted. When we forget some things, we forget or surrender the reason which makes us men. If we have been regarding regeneration as a mere emotion, a happy frame of mind, a time of gracious weeping, on account of vividly-remembered sin, I wonder not that we have gone back and walked no more with the sons of light. We mistook the occasion; we committed an error of judgment rather than a crime of will. When a man has once had his soul filled with God, he can never be a bad man again—slip he may a thousand times a day, but the seed of God abideth in him. From this sight Jacob begins a new life; he will often cheat and supplant, and scheme—that is in the man's queer blood—but he will die upwards, heavenwards. We must wait to see how he dies.

Wonderful is the effect of Divine communion. Take it in the case of Jacob. Jacob said he was *afraid*. We do not know the whole meaning of that word in such circumstances. Jacob said, "How dreadful is this place!" Circumstances are sometimes necessary to the definition of terms. What earthquakes shattered old policies and deceits we cannot tell; what idols of the heart were killed in that mighty awe we know not; what creeping things that defiled the soul were slain by the cold of that stony fear we cannot tell. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"—not the intellectual veneration which is sometimes mistaken for fear, but the moral obeisance of the whole man, feeling its littleness and seeing the infinite quality of God.

Jacob was also *humbled*. His expression is: "I knew it not

—I never suspected it ; this is an enlargement of my imagination ; this is a surprise of every faculty." We must be made to feel our ignorance before we can begin our knowledge. Jacob felt his smallness ; Jacob cringed under the sharp bite of self-contempt. This is a necessary process in religious education. So long as there is one pulse of pride left, there is no conversion ; so long as the right hand supposes it can do one good thing of itself apart from God, prayer is an impossibility ; so long as the soul can say of the Ten Commandments "All these have I kept from my youth," it cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. It must have received a commandment that slays it with an utter and unsparing blow. The mighty must be brought down, the proud must be humbled, the supposedly wise must be uncrowned. "Ye must be born again."

What a beautiful moral sequence brings to a close the whole incident. "Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. . . . And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will . . . I will." The amended translation of Jacob's vow reads thus : "If Elohim will be with me, and will protect me on this journey that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and if I come again in peace to my father's house, and Jehovah will be my Elohim, then this stone which I have set up as a pillar shall be Beth-Elohim ; and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely pay thee tithes." We have all said so, and some of us have never fulfilled the vow. We rose up from the bed of sickness, and said, "Hence on, every pulse is God's, every breath a prayer." We have been delivered from danger, from poverty, from despair, and we have written our great vow, and have blasphemously forgotten every word of the covenant.

What has taken place in regard to the transaction with Esau ? Everything ; we are on the right course. First, be right with God. The time comes when there can be no amendment, no compromise, no arrangement with creditors, no compounding ; no givings, takings, strange concessions, but when life becomes a religious agony and interview with God. Hence the two commands—which are one—"Thou shalt [first] love the Lord thy God ; thou shalt [second] love thy neighbour as thyself." The

second is impossible without the first. If you are at enmity with your fellow-creatures, you cannot settle it between you : both of you must first see God. Jacob saw him ; Esau beheld him ; and, when the men wept upon one another's neck, they realised, and manifested, and incarnated the love of God.

Gen. xxix.-xxxi.

IN THE SERVICE OF LABAN.

THE story occupied by Genesis xxix.-xxxi. represents one of the oft-recurring mysteries of human life. That is to say, in view of what has just taken place, that story seems to be an anti-climax, and is felt to be, in some serious sense, even a disappointment. It is almost impossible to bring the mind from the contemplations upon which it has just been fixed to read such an incident as that which spreads itself over these three chapters. When a man has seen angels, heaven, God : whatever he sees next must be poor and small, wanting in light and pale in colour. It is hardly just to some scenes to come to them from greater visions. By force of contrast they do not get the credit which is fairly due to their smaller dimensions and their simpler beauty. After all, in every sense, it is a long way from heaven to earth. We have first seen Jacob made solemn by a great fear, and ennobled by a surprising revelation ; now he has become as he was yesterday and the day before—one of ourselves. Yet this is the way through which we are divinely conducted all life through—sometimes on the mountain ; then swiftly driven down into lonely places ; to-day in great rapture—almost in heaven—everything there but the body,—and to-morrow we shall be writing our names in the dust, eating the bread which stands for a moment between us and death, and be quite common men again. We tell of a great dream, saying what we have seen in the visions of the night, and presently we are sold off into Egyptian slavery ; our faces burn when we commune with God upon the mountain-top, and presently we descend to be mocked by Aaron and Miriam ; now we are upon Tabor, the mount of transfiguration, where we would gladly build ; and behold presently we are sent down to heal the sorrow which is moaning

at its base. It is so with Jacob now. After the fulness of light, the quiver of mysterious joy which is half fear, half hope, he must pick up the threads of life and work patiently like a drudge who has never been off the common way. This is so with us. The poetical balance of things would be disturbed when we read this history but for the confirmation of it which is supplied by our own daily experience; we should say the contrast is too sudden, too violent; only one hour has passed, and behold the great transformation has been wrought. As literary readers we would criticise the swiftness of the transition, and ask for more space, and a finer gradation of events; but life is always contradicting criticism, for life will have its own strange way. God will not accept the pathways which we cut for his Providence; he reigns, he is the One Sovereign; there is no measure to be laid upon his scheme of things; we must take its unfoldment as he sends it—always holding ourselves ready for gracious surprises, for new changes, for unexpected wonders and heavens. How wondrous the change here! We, who have just been with Jacob in his dream, and have overheard his solemn words, now see him with staff in hand going on his journey, and coming into the land of the people of the east.

Jacob has left home as a *deceiver*—how will he be made to feel that? In a very direct manner: Jacob himself will be deceived, as he had deceived his own father. There is no escape from that rule. Judgment cannot be avoided or evaded, eluded, bribed, or deprived of its terrific but righteous force and claim. Jacob goes out and is himself deceived: the only intelligible way by which he can be taught the wickedness of deceit. Yet how surprised we are when we are made the victims of our own policy. Jacob was amazed when he found that he had been deceived by his kinsfolk. His countenance was a picture; his face was marked all over with signs of amazement that *he*, of all living creatures, should have been deceived. We do not like to be paid in our own coin; it does not enter into our minds that we have to reap the produce which we have sown. Is it to be supposed that we can do just what we like, and hasten away from the consequences, or escape the penalty due to evil? “Be sure your sin will find you out.” What eyes it has! what keenness

of scent! what little need of rest or sleep! The sinner has but twelve hours in the day—judgment has twenty-four; it overtakes us in the dark. If we have been vainly thinking that we would sleep and the sin would sleep at the same time, we have miscalculated the operation of forces. Is not Jacob most human when he lifts up his pale, innocent face, and says, “What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?” How soon we forget our own selves. The mark of the supplanter was upon every feature of his face; he was a vagabond on the face of the earth; he had himself run away from the deception of his own father, and behold he says, “What is this thou hast done unto me?” Jacob turned into Daniel! The supplanter on the judicial seat! The beautiful innocence that never put on skins that his hands might be hairy asks Laban however it has come to pass that he, Jacob, of all guileless persons, should be deceived. We understand the mystery: it is part of our own daily life;—but how utterly surprising that any of *us* should be misled, that *we* should be robbed, that *we* should be unkindly treated. Is there not a cause? Can you rob others without in turn being robbed? Can you sow bad seed and reap good crops? Can you escape the solemn consequence of events which is now known amongst us and magnified under the holy name of Providence? Is there not a God that judgeth in the earth—a mysterious, unmeasurable, sometimes unnameable, Power that seizes us and says, “There is something due to you now”? Then comes the great stroke that almost severs us in twain; then the great blow that stuns us and lays us prostrate on the earth, or then the subtle craftiness that makes fools of us in the twilight, mocks us in the darkness, and leaves us helpless in the morning. We ask, What is this? Poor innocence, sweet guilelessness; how can it be that any Laban should have sunk to such a depth of wickedness as to practise an imposture upon *us*? How odd that *we* should have to suffer. How mysterious the ways of Providence. No: how mysterious the ways of *man* first. There is a mystery in us: that we, who were made to sing God’s praise, and to hold converse with heaven in holy prayer, should have deceived the old, and the blind, and the helpless. *That* is the ineffable and eternal mystery. “Though hand join in hand,

the wicked shall not be unpunished." "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." "The Lord hath done unto me as I have done unto others." It is well; the balance of things is exquisitely kept. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord"—not to-day, or to-morrow, or here, or there according to your fixing and appointing: but God's word cannot be broken. Is this a shaft shot into the core of some hearts? Is this an awful blow aimed at some self-righteousness? The Lord be blessed! There is a smiting that is followed by healing; there is a cry of contrition which may be followed by a hymn of praise.

Further pursuing the story, you will find that Jacob must be made to feel the strength and agony of natural instincts, and so enter into sympathy with his distressed father. The Lord will complete his educational work in Jacob; the Lord will make him cry bitterly. We do not deceive our fathers for nothing. The Lord will not allow the old man's heart to be sawn asunder, as it were, by our cruelty, without making us feel some day what sorrow we have wrought. In the far-away land, Jacob speaks about "mine own place, and my country," saying, "Let me go back to them; nor let me go alone: let me take with me my wives and my children." Thus God gets hold of us at a thousand points. God creates a great heart-hunger for the old country, the old homestead, the old folks we have left behind, the old associations; and that hunger bites us, gives us mortal pain, and, through that hunger, we are sometimes led to pray. Jacob says, "Let me take my wives and my children with me. He is beginning himself now to feel the mystery of the home-feeling. When he perpetrated the deed of supplanting, and accomplished the transfer of the blessing to himself, there was in the view of his selfishness but one man; he seemed to have no one to consider but himself; he could perform an evil deed and flee away without needing family counsel, or without rending family or paternal sensibility on his own part. Now the case is different: now Jacob has struck his social roots deep into the earth: now it is like taking up some well-planted tree to move him. Yet he says, "Let me go." God thus gets hold of us: he gets hold of us through our

little children, through our family interests, through our household circle. We are nailed and bound down by uncontrollable instincts and forces. Again and again these forces renew themselves. Why does not Jacob go away alone? He cannot: there are some murders which even Jacob cannot commit. How is it that even men who can lie, deceive, cheat, rob, and do many wicked things, always fall back from one particular crime which seems to shock them and produce in their minds a feeling of unutterable revulsion? This is the mystery of God. It is imaginatively hard to break all the ten commandments at a stroke: who does not leave just one that he cannot violate? and having left that one which he himself cannot break, how the man wonders that any other human creature can break that particular statute. He prides himself that one is untouched, and has yet upon it the bloom of its honour. In what various ways our hearts are wrung. Could we see a map of all the ways by which men are brought back again to God, we should be amazed at the intricacy, and relations, and crossings of the innumerable lines;—here they coincide, there they sharply separate, again they seem to touch; across them run other lines in great surprises of movement, and yet, by some mysterious action, all the lines converge upon the abandoned house of the Father, the discarded altar of the Cross, and all the various voices of life are one in the solemn pathos of the confession and petition for pardon. This is the Lord's way.

As to the transactions between Jacob and Laban, they must stand without explanation or defence. They amaze us. It would seem impossible for some men to live other than a life of trickery, scheming, and selfish policy. Did we not know it in ourselves, we should resent it on the page of the biographer, or in the verses of the poet. It is a mystery in the moral kingdom beyond all other mysteries of a human kind that men can be perpetrating deeds of evil, can be following policies of self-aggrandisement, can be telling or acting lies, and yet all the time have a certain broad line of religious feeling and aspiration drawing itself through their divided and chaotic life. This is mystery. We need not go into heaven to ask for wonders: we ourselves are living problems; enigmas to which there is no present and satisfactory reply. Jacob was still a swindler; Jacob still divided his week into opportunities for promoting himself and

deceiving his mother's brother. Do not let us become special pleaders on Jacob's behalf. All I can say can be said under two divisions of thought. First, *God* spared Jacob : therefore I must not strike ; God forbore him, had patience with him, saw something in him that no one else could see. Blessed be God ! he is the same with us, or who could live one whole day upon the earth ? Were he to mark one iniquity in a thousand, who could ever pray again ? or lift up his head in hope ? or feel upon his blanched face the warmth of the sun's bright smile ? *God* sees in every Jacob more than Jacob sees in himself. Second : We may not really know the *whole* story. Who can tell all a man's life—every word, syllable, and tittle of it ? We are all seen in phases, aspects, and partial manifestations, and the reports which are made of us partake very largely of the imperfection of the manifestations which we ourselves make to our fellow-creatures. We do not know all that Jacob did, or all that Laban did. We know in part ; the part we do know we do not admire ; but we must always fall back upon the circumstance that God spares, and therefore has a reason for the sparing. If the case were so narrow, and little, and puny, as we often make it—a criminal and a judge, a felony and destruction—why then the whole tragedy of life could be settled in a moment ; but in the worst of us there is some faint sparkle of better things which God sees,—in the meanest of us there is a soul meant for heaven. Even the man who is basest, who has broken all the commandments, and has been almost sorry there were not more commandments to break,—has in him, in God's sight, some point on which, if not the Divine complacency, the Divine compassion may be fixed. His mercy endureth for ever ; his patience is greater than our transgression. Where sin aboundeth, grace doth much more abound—like a great billow of the sea rising, heightening, swelling into infiniteness of pathos. On these grounds, then, I rest, viz., the forbearance of God, therefore the possibility of features of a redeeming kind I do not see ; and, second, the incompleteness of my knowledge which, when completed, may enable me to judge otherwise. This will be the explanation of the rest of heaven ; this will be the mitigation of the judgment day—namely, that we shall then see things from God's own standpoint. We shall then see hell as God sees it ; we shall then know perfectly

according to the measure of our capacity ; and whether the issue be darkness outer and unspeakable, or light complete and ineffable, we shall say, "He hath done all things well."

How bold a book is the Bible. The Bible hides nothing of shame ; the Bible is not afraid of words which make the cheek burn ; the Bible conceals nothing of moral crippleness, infirmity, or weakness, or evil. The Bible holds everything up in the light. Recognise, at least, the fearless honesty of the book. This is not a gallery of artistic figures ; this is no gathering together of dramatic characters—painted, arrayed, taught to perform their part æsthetically, without fault and beyond criticism ; these are living men and women—when they pray, when they sin, when they shout like a host of worshippers, and when they fall down like a host of rebels, or flee like a host of cowards. The Bible paints real characters. God says what is true about every one of us. If there is shame in it, we must feel it : the wrong is ours, not his. No other book could be so dauntless, could paint what we call the defective side of human nature with so bold a hand and yet claim to be the revelation of God. Things, however, must always be looked at in their proper relation and in their right perspective. You may bring some chapters of the Bible so closely to your eyes as to be shocked by their revelations. You say they are not to be read, they are not to be spoken of : they are to be quickly hastened over. Or you yourself can rise by the grace of God to such heroic righteousness as to be able to look upon putrefaction, and blasphemy, and all wickedness, and great hell itself, and name them all without a blush, or without a shudder. Things are what they are in their right relation and proper atmosphere.

So we return to our starting-point. Life is varied—sometimes a dream all light, sometimes a vision of blue heavens ; a great cloudless day, or a night burning with innumerable stars—lamps of an unseen sanctuary ; sometimes a transfiguration, sometimes a holy ecstasy, sometimes a vale of tears—a place of weeping, a desert of sand, a sea all storm ; sometimes extraordinary—all but supernatural, without one trace of commonness or familiarity upon it ; and then servitude, sheep-tending, field-culture,—monotony : rising in the morning, going the daily round, retiring at night weary, eating the bread of industry, and sleeping the sleep

of honesty—a commonplace, dull, pendulum-life. So be it. It is not mine to choose my life: let me resign the disposal of the lot into the hand of God, saying, “Lord, if it be mine to dream on the way to Padan-aram, and to build a Bethel in unexpected places, blessed be thy name! Or if it be mine to be a common herdsman, a gatherer of sycamore fruit; if it be mine to be a hewer of wood or a drawer of water, thy will be done; if thou dost mean me to be a flying angel, thy will be done; if thou dost lay me upon a bed of suffering and say, ‘By patience learn the mystery of my purpose,’ thy will, my God, not mine be done.” To say all this under such circumstances is to touch the very acme and sublimity of grace.

Gen. xxxvii. 19.

“And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.”

JOSEPH'S DREAM.

WE learn from this verse how prejudice shuts us up to one particular view of a man—the view which is most distasteful to us, and upon which we persuade ourselves, we can remark with the justice of injury and anger. Joseph was the child of his father's old age, the idol of the old man's heart, the light of the household,—and yet his brethren had got one view of him to which they could never close their eyes. He was nothing to them but a dreamer of unpalatable dreams, a seer of visions which more or less impaired their own dignity and clouded their own prospects. It is the same to-day. Envy never changes. Prejudice never modifies into a virtue. To-day we do not like the dreamers who have seen visions which involve us more or less in decay and inferiority. It is not easy to forgive a man who has dreamed an unpleasant dream concerning us. We cannot easily forgive a man who has founded an obnoxious institution. If a man has written a book which is distasteful to us, it is no matter, though he should do ten thousand acts which ought to excite our admiration and confirm our confidence; we will go back and back upon the obnoxious publication, and whensoever that man's name is mentioned that book will always come up in

association with it. Is this right? Ought we to be confined in our view of human character to single points, and those points always of a kind to excite unpleasant, indignant, perhaps vindictive, feelings? The world's dreamers have never had an easy lot. Do not let us imagine that Joseph was called to a very easy and comfortable position when he was called to see the visions of Providence in the time of his slumber. God speaks to men by dream and by vision, by strange scene and unexpected sight, and we who are prosaic groundlings are apt to imagine that those men who live in transcendental regions, who are privileged occasionally to see the invisible, have all the good fortune of life, and we ourselves are but servants of dust and hirelings ill-paid. No: the poets have their own pains, the dreamers have their own peculiar sorrows. Men of double sight often have double difficulties in life. Do not let us suppose that we are all true dreamers. Let us distinguish between the nightmare of dyspepsia and the dreams of inspiration. It is not because a man has had a dream that he is to be hearkened unto. It is because the dream is a Parable of Heaven that we ought to ask him to speak freely and fully to us concerning his wondrous vision, that we may see farther into the truth and beauty of God's way concerning man.

"Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams" (xxxvii. 20).

After this profound scheme no doubt there would follow a chuckle of triumph. The thing was so lucky in its plan, in its seasonableness, in its practicability; it seemed to meet every point of the case; it made an end of the whole difficulty; it turned over a new leaf in the history of the family. Let us understand that our plans are not good simply because they happen to be easy. Let us understand that a policy is not necessarily sound because it is necessarily final. In the case before us we see both the power and weakness of men. Let us slay,—there is the power; and we will see what will become of his dreams,—there is the weakness. You can slay the dreamer, but you cannot touch the dream. You can poison the preacher, but what power have you over his wonderful doctrine? Can you trace it? Where are its footprints? Ten or twelve men have power to take one lad, seventeen years of age, to double him up,

and throw him, a dead carcase, into a pit. Wonderful power ! What then ? "And we will see what will become of his dreams." A word which perhaps was spoken in scorn or derision, or under a conviction that his dreams would go along with him. Still, underlying all the derision is the fact that, though the dreamer has been slain, the dream remains untouched. The principle applies very widely. You may disestablish an institution externally, politically, financially; but if the institution be founded upon truth, the Highest himself will establish her. If we suppose that by putting out our puny arms and clustering in eager crowds round the ark of God, we are the only defenders of the faith and conservers of the Church—then be it known unto us that our power is a limited ability, that God himself is the life, the strength, the defence, and the hope of his own kingdom. The principle, then, has a double application;—an application to those who would injure truth, and an application to those who would avail themselves of forbidden facilities to maintain the empire of God amongst men.

"And we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him." It is convenient in life to have even a beast that you can lay the blame upon. Life would be to some of us very insipid if we could not blame somebody for every evil word we say, and every evil thing we do. "Some evil beast hath devoured him." We are unkind to beasts. No beast can be so bad as a bad man. There is no tiger in the forest that can be so savage as a pitiless mother. There is no wolf that ever came down upon a fold that can be so awful in passion, in malignity, and in evil deed, as a man who has lost self-control, and is carried away by his lawless passions.

"And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him : that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again " (xxxvii. 22).

We must not be harsh upon Reuben in this connection ; although the Reubens of society are often difficult men to deal with. Instead of coming right to the front and speaking the decisive word, they avail themselves of some intermediate course, so that their very virtue becomes diluted into a kind of vice. When a man has not the courage of his convictions, his convictions may even become a temptation and a stumbling-block to society. Reuben's intention was good, and let all due credit be given to

every man who has a good intention : a merciful object in view. No one of us has a word to say against such a man. But there are times when everything depends upon tone, precision, definiteness, emphasis. I am not sure that Reuben could not have turned the whole company. There are times when one man can rule a thousand. A little one can put ten thousand to flight. Why ? Because wickedness is weakness. There is more craven-heartedness among bad men than ever you can find among men who are soundly, livingly good. Is that a hard message to some of you ? You know a very bold wicked man. Well, so you do ; but that man is a coward. One day the shaking of a feather will cause him to become pale, and to tremble and turn round suspiciously, and timidly, as if every leaf in the forest had an indictment against him, and all the elements in the universe had conspired to destroy him.

Here is a call to us, most assuredly. We are placed in critical circumstances. Sometimes eight or nine men upon a board of directors have said that their plan will take this or that particular course. We believe that the plan is corrupt ; we believe that it is wicked ; displeasing to God, mischievous to man. What is our duty under circumstances such as these ? To modify, to pare away, to dilute sound principle and intense conviction, to speak whisperingly, timidly, apologetically ? I think not. But to meet the proposition with the definiteness of sound principle, and to be in that minority which is in the long run omnipotent—the minority of God. It is not easy to do this. Far be it from me to say that if I had been in Reuben's place I should have taken a more emphatic course. We are not called upon, in preaching God's truth, to say what we should have done under such circumstances ; but to put out that which is ideal, absolute, final, and then to exhort one another, to endeavour, by God's tender, mighty grace, to press towards its attainment.

“And they sat down to eat bread : and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt” (xxxvii. 25).

There are times when circumstances seem to favour bad men. Some of us are accustomed to teach that circumstances are the voice of Divine Providence. There is a sense—a profound sense

in which that is perfectly true. God speaks by combinations of events, by the complications of history, by unexpected occurrences. Most undoubtedly so. We have marked this. In many cases we have seen their moral meaning, and have been attracted to them as the cloudy pillar in the daytime and the fire by night. At the same time there is another side to that doctrine. Here in the text we find circumstances evidently combining in favour of the bad men who had agreed to part with their brother. They sat down to eat bread,—perfectly tranquil, social amongst themselves, a rough hospitality prevailing. Just as they sat down to enjoy themselves with their bread, they lifted up their eyes, and at that very moment a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels. What could be more providential? They came in the very nick of time. The brethren had not to go up and down hawking their brother, knocking at door after door to ask if anybody could take him off their hands; but at the very moment when the discussion was pending, and anxiety was at white heat, circumstances so combined and converged as to point out the way of Providence and the path of right. Then we ought to look at circumstances with a critical eye. We ought first to look at moral principles, and then at circumstances. If the morality is right, the eventuality may be taken as an element worthy of consideration in the debate and strife of the hour. But if the principles at the very base are wrong, we are not to see circumstances as Divine providences, but rather as casual ways to the realisation of a nefarious intent. Let us be still more particular about this. I do not deny that these Ishmaelites came providentially at that identical moment. I believe that the Ishmaelites were sent by Almighty God at that very crisis, and that they were intended by him to offer the solution of the difficult problem. But it is one thing for us to debase circumstances to our own use and convenience, and another to view them from God's altitude and to accept them in God's spirit.

“And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?” (xxxvii. 26).

The very brightest and luckiest idea of all. He touched human nature to the very quick when he said, What profit is it? And instantly they seemed to convict themselves of a kind of thick-

headedness, and said one to another, "Ah, to be sure; why, no profit at all. Here is an opportunity of selling him, and that will turn to the account of us all. Sell is as short a word as slay. Sell! that will get clear of him. Let us sell. Sell! we shall have no blood upon our hands. Then we shall, perhaps, have a couple of shekels a-piece, and throwing them up in the air an inch or so, and catching them again, hear their pleasant chink. This is the plan, to be sure. This is the way out of the difficulty. We are sorry we ever thought of shedding blood; we shake ourselves from all such imputations. Let us sell the lad, and there will be an end of the difficulty." Selling does not always take a man out of difficulty. Bargain-making is not always satisfactory. There is a gain that is loss; there is a loss that is gain. There is a separation that takes the hated object from our eyes, yet that object is an element in society and in life—working, penetrating, developing—and it will come back again upon us some day with greater power, with intensified poignancy; and the man that was driven away from us a beggar and a slave may one day rise up in our path, terrible as an avenger, irresistible as a judgment of God. Well, his brethren were content. Men even say that they enjoy a very great peace, and therefore, if circumstances are tolerably favourable, they say that, on the whole, they feel in a good state of mind. Therefore they conclude that they have not been doing anything very wrong. Let us understand that vice may have a soporific effect upon the conscience and judgment; that we may work ourselves into such a state of mind as to place ourselves under circumstances that are factitious, unsound in their moral bearing, however enjoyable may be their immediate influence upon the mind.

I am struck by this circumstance, in reading the account which is before me, namely, how possible it is to fall from a rough kind of vice, such as "Let us slay our brother," into a milder form of iniquity, such as "Let us sell our brother," and to think that we have now actually come into a state of virtue. That is to say, *selling* as contrasted with *slaying* seems so moderate and amiable a thing, as actually to amount to a kind of virtue. Am I understood upon this point? We are not to compare one act with another and say, Comparatively speaking this act is good. Virtue is not a quantity to be compared. Virtue is a non-declinable

quantity. Comparing themselves thus they became wise. This kind of comparison has given place to the proverb that there is "honour among thieves." That is impossible. The thievish man will have a thievish honour. It is true still, and will ever remain true, that unless we can set our motives, purposes, intentions, in the full blaze of God's holiness, we shall become the victims of phrases, and be deluded by appearances. We debase circumstances into teachers of God's providences, which were meant to be warnings, threatenings, and judgments. Against comparative morality and comparative virtue, we are called upon to protest. I know how easy it is, when some very startling proposition has been before the mind, to accept a modified form of the proposition, which in itself is morally corrupt; and yet to imagine, by the very descent from the other point, that we have come into a region of virtue. When men say, "Let us slay our brother," there is a little shuddering in society. We don't want to slay our brother. "Well, then," says an acute man, "let us sell him." And, instantly, amiable Christian people say, "Ay, ay, this is a very different thing; yes, let us sell him." Observe, the morality is not changed, only the point in the scale has been lowered. When God comes to judge he will not say, Is this virtue and water? is this diluted vice? but, Is this right? is this wrong? The standard of judgment will be the holiness of God.

Now the brethren had to account for what they had done. They had to make out a case, and case-making is a very difficult business, where the morality is wrong. There is a good deal of stuccoing and veneering, angling and patching, and stitching and arranging to be done. We shall say some evil beast hath devoured him, we will dip his coat in the blood of a goat and say, Judge whether this be thy son's or no. Yes, men will one day have to account for the things which make up their life. "We will say,"—there is the point. Bad men have to argue upon what they were going to say. Bad men could never afford to be inconsistent and discrepant in their statements. Bad men have to get together, and rub off corners, and rectify angles, and agree upon methods of transition from this point to that point. Twelve honest men have never to get together that they may

agree upon this statement and the next plan. They may go one after another and be judged alone, and each tell his own story. And when the twelve statements have been made, there will be little discrepancies, or points of inconsistency, yet all these admit of being wrought up into an impressive consistency, because the basis is true, and the intention of each witness is good. Forty or fifty bad men would never have written such a Bible as we have. It would have been a smoother Bible; there would not have been any apparent discrepancies and inconsistencies; it would have been an easy-flowing and consistent narrative. Observe, there is a consistency which is suspicious. There is a disagreement which is only the outcome of a healthy, loving, true, devout nature.

Gen. xxxix.

"And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither" (ver. 1.).

JOSEPH'S CAPTIVITY.

UP to this time we hear next to nothing of what Joseph himself said or thought about the peculiar, the romantic, and the distressing circumstances under which he was placed. It occurs to me, however, to call attention to one observation of his, omitted in our last reading. You remember that Joseph had two remarkable dreams, in both of which his own prospective supremacy was broadly indicated. He dreamed that all other sheaves bowed down before his sheaf. He dreamed, also, that the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to him; and yet, whilst these dreams were in his recollection, his father called to him and proposed that he should go to see whether it was well with his brethren and well with the flocks. When Jacob made this proposition, the prospectively great man, instantly, humbly, with filial simplicity and love, answered, "Here am I." There is a lesson, in this reply, to young men, who have dreams of future greatness,—who see sheaves falling down before their sheaf, and see the host of heaven making obeisance to them. Meanwhile, if you are children, obey your

parents in the Lord. If you are servants, do the day's work, not with the hireling's niggardliness, but with a servant's noble trust, with self-expedniture, with an attention which commands confidence, and with a diligence that ought to merit reward. It is always a great pity when a man's dreams destroy his strength for practical work and his interest in the affairs that are round about him. No man can live healthily on dreams. If the dreamer be not superior to his dreams, in the meantime, then he will become the victim of fancies ; he will be led about under the enchantment of the most mocking delusions ; and he who might, by humbly, patiently, and nobly waiting, have become a great man, will subside into common-place, and leave no recollection for which the world or his friends in particular will thank him.

This is nearly all that we hear of Joseph's own speech. Up to this time he has been to a large extent silent. In the verse before us we hear nothing of his thoughts or of his speech. How is this ? The deepest things in life are never told. When men are in their greatest sorrows they are often also in the deepest silence. There are crises in life when we cannot speak, —we are stunned, overwhelmed, dismayed. We look almost vacant to observers whose eyes are upon us. They cannot understand our speechlessness ; whilst they themselves are under such great excitement, they wonder at our passivity. There is an excitement that is passive ; there is a passion that is latent ; there is a vehemence of feeling which is often kept under restraint. Men misunderstand us because, in our sorest experiences, we do not exclaim aloud ; we do not protest against the injury which is being inflicted upon us : we are led off in silence, and we seem to justify those who injure us by want of protest, and argument, and vehement denial of the justice which is being accorded to us. Learn that there is a sublimity of silence. There are two ways of enduring the wrongs of life. An exclamatory, effusive, protesting style of endurance ; and a silent, calm, dignified acceptance of trial, scourge, injury, injustice, wrong. The quiet man has suffering as well as the stormy man ; and not always those who protest most loudly feel most keenly the impression which the iron is making on their souls.

"And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian" (xxxix. 2).

There are many ways in which the Lord is with a man. Not always by visible symbol; seldom by an external badge which we can see and read. God is with a man in the suggestion of thought; in the animation of high, noble, heavenly feeling; in the direction of his steps, in the inditement of his speech, enabling him to give the right love, the right answer at the right time under the right circumstances; giving him the schooling which he could never pay for; training him by methods and processes unknown in human schools, and not to be understood except by those who have passed under them. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God." Ideas are the gifts of God, as well as wheat-fields, and vineyards, and other fruits of the earth. Suggestions in business, delivering thoughts in the time of extremity, silence when it is better than speech, speech when it will do more than silence. "This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working." The Lord was with Joseph, and yet Joseph was under Potiphar. These are the contradictions and anomalies of life which ill-taught souls can never understand, and which become to them mysteries which torment their spirits and which distract their love. Undoubtedly this is an anomalous state of life: Joseph brought down to Egypt by his purchasers,—Joseph sold into the house of Potiphar,—bought and sold and exchanged like an article of merchandise. Yet, he was a prosperous man! Understand that there are difficulties which cannot impair prosperity, and that there is a prosperity which dominates over all external circumstances and vindicates its claim to be considered a Divine gift. Looking at this case through and through, one would say, it is hardly correct to assert that Joseph was a prosperous man, when he was to all intents and purposes in bondage, when he was the property of another, when not one hour of his time belonged to himself, when he was cut off from his father and from his brethren. Yet, it is distinctly stated that, notwithstanding these things, the Lord was with him and he was prosperous.

There must be a lesson here. When men live in their circumstances they never can be prosperous. When a man has to go out into his wheat-field to know whether there is going to be a

good crop before he can really enjoy himself,—that man does not know what true joy is. When a man has to read out of a bank-book before he dare take one draught out of the goblet of happiness,—that man's thirst for joy will never be slaked. Man cannot live in wheat-fields, and bank-books, and things of the present world. If he cannot live within himself, in the very sanctuary and temple of God, then he is at the sport of every change of circumstance,—one shake of the telegraph wire may unsettle him, and the cloudy day may obscure his hopes, and darken what little soul he has left. If Joseph had lived in his external circumstances, he might have spent his days in tears and his nights in hopelessness; but, living a religious life, living with God, walking with God, identifying his very soul's life with God, then the dust had no sovereignty over him, external circumstances were under his feet. This is the solution of many of our difficulties. Given a man's relation to God, you have the key of his whole life. If that relation be disturbed, unequal, distracted, unsatisfactory, never bringing light and peace unto his heart and mind, then, whatsoever prosperity (so called) may attend his outward life, it is but a gilded coating which will be worn off by time, and which cannot stand the test of the greatest crises of life. Understand, then, how possible it is to be an exile, a slave: cut off from father, and mother, and home, and friendship, and yet to be a prosperous man. The man lies deeper than the slave. The Christian is, so to speak, higher than the man. He who has the bread of heaven to eat spends his life in the very banqueting-house of God.

“And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand” (xxxix. 3).

There is something about a religious man that is not to be found about any other man. Pagans can see whether God is with us. Heathens and idolatrous men have some notion of our religious position, our religious thinking, our religious relationships. Potiphar knew nothing about the true God, yet saw in this fair-faced youth something he had not seen before. Such is the mysterious working of the higher life in a man. How did Potiphar see that the Lord was with Joseph? Because Joseph made long religious speeches to him whenever he had a spare

hour? It is not said so here. Because Joseph wrote out in illuminated characters a brilliant religious creed? hung it up in his chamber, or bound it round his forehead? It is not said so in the text. Potiphar saw that the Lord was with him because all that he did prospered. You can only get at some minds through external phenomena, through circumstances, through evidence that appeals to the senses. It was not through the deepest religious things that Potiphar came to understand that the Lord was with Joseph; but, reasoning from the outside to the interior, he came to the conclusion that, as a mysterious and unmingled prosperity attended everything this young man did, there was no solution for such a state of things but a religious one. This man is the Lord's servant, and the Lord's crown of approbation rests upon his honoured head. How far is it possible to be any man's servant, and yet to conceal from that man that we know the true God? A nice problem in casuistry! How long may a man be in the service of his employer, and his employer never have a conception that the man knows that there is so much as a God in the universe? Some of us have a very skilful way of concealing our religion. Perhaps you have been in the employment of your master seven years, and your master is surprised and startled to find that you are a member of a church, and that you take the Lord's Supper from time to time. Now, there ought to be ways of revealing the deepest life. We ought not to be all surface. There ought to be subtleties of expression, of movement, mysteries of conduct, which cannot be explained on any other ground than that we take our soul's law from the lips of the Eternal, and that we never do anything without first seeking the sanction and benediction of God. Oh, but some of us are exceedingly afraid of what we term "cant"! We can produce the evidences of our Christianity without saying a word. You cannot talk to some men without being the better, even for five minutes, in their company. It was said of one of our great English statesmen that you could not meet him under shelter during a rain-shower without being impressed with the fact that he was a remarkable man. We can understand that very well. There is influence in the expression of the countenance, in the glance of the eye, in the tone of the voice, in the little courtesies of life, in the small things which some men hold in

contempt. Some men speak light. Some men bring with them the terribleness of judgment, when we are doing anything in their presence that is mean, sneaking, cowardly, or unworthy of manhood. We feel, when they get round about us, that they are like a flame—piercing, scorching at every point. Yet they never preach to us, they never lecture us, they never go over the points of their theology to us : still, it is as impossible to disbelieve their sincerity and nobility as it is to deny the shining of the sun at noonday.

Perhaps we ought to pause here to point out that prosperity of the kind to which Potiphar referred is not always granted to men in vindication of their Christian sincerity and filial relation to God. Sometimes our manner of bearing adversity is the seal of our sonship : our patience under failure, our magnanimity in the time of trial, our hopefulness and chastened cheerfulness when the east wind is blowing or the clouds are thick and threatening. This may testify that we have learned of God. It is enough, therefore, to lay down this doctrine broadly, thus : When a man loves the Lord, and his ways please the Lord, there will be some opportunity of showing the man is not all surface, but that he has a deep true Christian heart, that he is a child of God, a son of light.

“And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake ; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house and in the field ” (xxxix. 5).

One man blessed for the sake of another. Here is a great law, —here is a special lesson for many. A man looks at his property, and reasons that he must be good, and approved of God, otherwise he never could have so many blessings in his possession. It never enters the man’s mind that he has every one of those blessings for the sake of another man. The master blessed because he has a good servant ! Would to God I could speak thunder-claps and lightnings to many thousands in our city and throughout all lands upon this very matter ! Here is a many for example, who never enters a place of worship. No, no,—not he. His wife is a member of the Church, and if ever she is five minutes late in on Sunday, his mighty lordship foams and fumes, and is not going to be put upon in this way, and have his household arrangements upset by these canting, fanatical, religious

people. What shall I call him? The wretch owes every penny he has to his dishonoured praying wife. If that woman—the only angel in God's universe that cares for his soul—were to cease praying for him, God might rain fire and brimstone upon him and his dwelling-place. He does not know it. No! He is shrewd, cunning, wide-awake, has his eyes open, knows when the iron is hot, and when to strike it, and he is such a wonderful genius in business. A maniac—not knowing that it is his praying wife that saves him from ruin, meanwhile from hell!

Here is another man who thinks it manly to blaspheme, swear, and use profane language upon every opportunity, and to ridicule religion and religious people. And that man prospers! His fields are verdant in spring-time, his crops are rich and golden in autumn. If you speak a word to him about religion, he laughs at you, and intimates, in a not very roundabout manner, that you are a fool. And he owes all he has to a little invalid girl, who believes in God and prays to him, and connects the house with Heaven! God blesses one man for the sake of another. The husband is blessed because of the godliness of the wife. The parent is honoured because of the Christianity of the child. The strong man has prospered in his way because of the poor weak creature in his house, who is mighty in soul towards God and truth. Yet these are the elements and the facts which are so often overlooked, when men take stock and tell what they are worth. Ten men keep the brimstone-and-fire shower back. The righteous are the salt of the earth. The true, loving, and God-fearing are the light of the world. But for them, would God be patient with the world? What would it be to him, with his great power, to crush the little world, to pulverise and throw it away on the flying winds, and forget it? It is Paul that saves the vessel on the stormy sea. It is Joseph that blesses the house of Potiphar. It is the ten praying men that save the Sodoms of the earth from the lightning-showers of judgment.

And this is God's plan all through. There is one Man for whose sake all other men are blessed. This is the principle of mediation which runs through all the Divine government of man. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father." When we go to God with the story of our sin, and the cry of our penitence, we are heard, not for our own sake, but for the sake

of Jesus Christ. It is the same principle,—the principle of interposition, the ministerial, mediatorial principle,—on which he conducts his government of human society. Does any poor guilty man want to talk to God? Here is the instruction for such a man. It will be for Christ's sake that God will hear you. And as long as Christ's name sanctifies and elevates your petitions you may pray on. There is no prayer long that gushes from the heart, and rises to God through the mediation of Christ.

After this Joseph had to encounter the great moral crisis of his life. He has already passed over what I may term the social crisis, the physical crisis. He has come out of that crisis calm, strong, reliant upon God. And now the great temptation seizes him,—is aimed at him, at least. Happily it cannot touch him. What is his answer to the temptation? This. God! There is no other true answer. When the tempter comes, when the enchantress stands there, what is the reply of the youth? God! And he is more than conqueror. "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" A man must go back upon his religious principles when he is tempted; he must not try to prove to the individual in question that it is inexpedient; he must not quote the example of the man who has sinned before him. He must take wing, and get away to God! And from the height of God's throne he must answer the temptation, and, when he does so, he will be more than conqueror. What are we, if we have not struggled against evil,—if we have not proved our manhood, given to us of God, on the battle-field? You are tempted to put forth your hand to steal; and ere you touch the forbidden property, you thought of God and recoiled, and you are now the stronger man for temptation overcome. There are temptations in life—temptations at every turning of the street—temptations in all the evolutions of daily circumstances—temptations that come suddenly—temptations that come unexpectedly—temptations that come flatteringly. There is no true, all-conquering, all-triumphant answer to the temptation of the devil but this,—*God!* Be deep in your religion, have foundations that are reliable, know your calling, and God will protect you when the time of battle, and storm, and flood shall come. He will do it, if so be we put our trust in him.

What is the cure for all that we have seen in the case of Joseph that is bad? For the envy of brothers, the malice of those who ought to be our saintly protectors from all evil-mindedness, from all worldly passion, from all selfishness, from all prejudice? What is the cure? The cure is crucifixion with the Son of God! Except we be crucified with Christ we shall have no hidden power. Except we know the fellowship of his sufferings we shall be foiled in the day of attack. There is one life that touches all other life beneficently, benignly, redeemingly,—that is the life of Jesus Christ. To those who need the exhortation, let me say:—Read that Life with an attention you have never bestowed upon it before, with special desire to know the meaning of that mysterious Life, and you will see that there is no point of human experience which it does not touch. Nothing has been forgotten, nothing overlooked. All sin, weakness, shame, fear, greatness, littleness—all man—has been comprehended within the scheme of that Life, and been redeemingly touched by the mighty power of the Son of God, who is also God the Son.

Gen. xxxix. 20.

“And Joseph’s master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were bound : and he was there in the prison.”

JOSEPH IN PRISON.

WE now know enough of the history of Joseph, to see that he had not done anything worthy of imprisonment and pain. Let us keep steadily in mind the fact that there are false accusations in human life. There is a tendency to believe charges against men, without patiently and carefully going into particulars, without making such moral inquest into them as ought alone to justify our belief in any charge that may be made against a human creature. We are prone to say, when an accusation is lodged against a man, “After all there must be something in it.” We reason that it is impossible to get up a charge against a man without that charge having, at least, some foundation. We think it charitable to add, “That probably it is not quite so bad as it looks ; yet, after all, there must be *something* in it.” Here is a case

in which that doctrine does not hold true at all. There is nothing in this but infamy. May it not be so amongst ourselves, to-day? Has human nature changed? Are there not, to-day, tongues that lie, hearts that are inspired by spite? We are in danger, I think, of being very pathetic indeed over historical characters, and forgetting the claims of modern instances. There are people who will be exceedingly vehement in their pity for Joseph, who can say spiteful or unkind words about their neighbour who is labouring under an accusation quite as groundless and quite as malicious as that which ended in the imprisonment of Joseph. There are men who will preach eloquent sermons about the fall of the Apostle Peter, who will yet, in the most unchristian spirit, expel and anathematise brethren who have been overtaken in a fault. And the worst of it is, they are apt to think that they show their own righteousness by being very vehement against the shortcomings of other people.

Now, history is wasted upon us if we do but shed tears for the ill-used men of far-gone centuries. See how easy it is to do mischief! You insinuated against a certain man that there was something wrong in his case. You never can withdraw your insinuation. You lie against your fellow-creature, and then apologise. You cannot apologise for a lie! Your lie will go where your apology can never follow it. And men who heard both the lie and the apology will, with a cowardice that is unpardonable, say, when occasion seems to warrant their doing so, that "they have heard that there was something or other about him, but they cannot tell exactly what it was." So mischief goes on from year to year, and a lie is, in the meantime, more powerful than the truth. It is always easier to do mischief than to do good. Let us, then, be careful about human reputation. The character is the man. It is better to believe all things, hope all things, endure all things, in the spirit of Christ's blessed charity, than to be very eager to point out even faults that do exist. There are men to-day who are suffering from accusations as false as the lie of Potiphar's wife. There are other men who have been sinned against by false accusations who have received withdrawments and apologies. But such, alas! is the state of so-called Christian charity, that, though we have a memory for the indictment, we have no recollection for what ought to have

been a triumphant, all-inclusive, and all-delivering vindication. Terrible is the state of that man who has a good memory for insinuations, charges, innuendoes, and bad suggestions, but no recollection for things that are beautiful, and healing, and redeeming, and helpful. That man's destiny is to wither away.

"But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (xxxix. 21)

What a poor compensation! The man's character is taken away, and the Lord gives him favour in the sight of a jailer! There are honours in life which are aggravations. My name is blasted, my home is broken up, my whole life is withered right away down into the roots, and on either side there is a turnkey somewhere who says he has great confidence in me! Why not have vindicated the man before Potiphar? Why not have withered up the accuser who took away his dear fair name? That would have been compensation. If, when the woman's mouth had opened to tell the lie, God had locked her wicked jaw, that would have been vindication. Instead of that, Joseph has the wonderfully good luck of being thought well of by a jailer. This is the danger of our criticism. We mistake the process for the result. We rush at the semicolon as if it were a full stop. We judge God by the fraction, not by the integer. I am prepared to grant that if the whole scene had ended here—if this had really been the culminating point, the completion of the sad romance—the favour which Joseph received of his jailer would have been a mockery, and he might have thrown such favour back in the face of God, as a poor compensation for the injury which had gone like iron into his soul, for suffering which had destroyed his sleep, and turned his days into wintry nights.

The difficulty of the critic is to be patient. He is so anxious to make a point that he often ruins himself by his own sagacity. He jumps in upon the way of God with such impetuosity that he has to spend the remainder of his days in apologising for his rudeness, his want of patient saintly dignity in waiting until God himself said, "It is finished." Still, the point of the favour accorded to Joseph by the jailer ought not to be forgotten in making up our view of life, for this reason:—We shall redeem ourselves from much suffering, help ourselves towards a nobler,

stronger, manlier endurance, by looking at the one bright point which remains in our life. Is there any life that has in it no speck of light? any day that has not in it one blue spot? What is the moral use and purpose of a glint of light and speck of blue? It is a reminder that there is still light; that the blue morning may come back again; and that God hath not—though the day be dark and cloudy and the wind be bitterly cold—forgotten to be gracious. Our honours may chafe us. We may reason from them that having so much, we ought to have more. What we require, when such impatience has reached us, is a devout, urgent desire that God will tame our impetuosity, and teach us the sweet mystery and the mighty power of child-like waiting.

“And it came to pass after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers. And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound” (xl. 1-3).

No man liveth unto himself. There is a little upset in the king's house, and, somehow or other, that will be linked with all these events that are happening a little way off. You run against a man in the dark; he remonstrates with you in a vexed tone, and, in that vexed tone, you hear the voice of your own long-lost brother. You go over the street without knowing what you have gone for, and you meet the destiny of your life. A child tells you its little dream, and that dream awakens a blessed memory which throws light upon some dark and frowning place in your life. Some people do not believe in dramas, not knowing that all life is an involved, ever-moving, ever-evolving drama. Life is a composition of forces. The chief butler gives Pharaoh the cup with a fly in it, and the chief baker spoils his baking. These things are to be added to some other things, and out of this combination there is to arise one of the most pathetic and beautiful incidents to be found in all the treasure-house of history. We do not know what is transpiring around us, and how we are to be linked on to collateral processes. There is a main line in our life; there are also little branch lines. You jostle against a man, and get into conversation with him, and learn from him

what you would have given gold for, had you known where it was to be found. Everything in life has a meaning. Mistakes have their meanings. Misunderstandings will often lead to the highest harmonies. No man can do without his fellow-men. It is a very sad thing, indeed, that we have to be obliged, in any sense, to a butler or a baker. But we cannot help it. It is no good attempting to shake out of the sack the elements we do not like. We cannot colonise ourselves in some fairy-land, where we can have everything according to our pick and choice. The labourer in the streets, the child in the gutter, the poor suffering wretch in the garret,—all these, as well as kings and priests, have to do with the grand up-making and mysterious total of the thing we call human life. God is always coming down to us through unlikely paths, meeting us unexpectedly, causing bushes to flame and become temples of his presence. We go out for our father's asses; we may return crowned men. There are some people who do not like religion because it is so mysterious, not knowing that their own life is a constantly progressing mystery. Whenever they would deliver themselves from the presence of mystery, they must deliver themselves from their very existence.

"And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison" (xl. 5).

The chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it. There are dreamers and there are dream interpreters. There are men who live by their ideas. Men who seem to be able to do nothing, and yet society could not get on without them. You see fifty men building a great house, and there is a man standing amongst them with his hands idle, and a black coat on. You say the fifty men are building the house, and a lazy man is standing there with his hands in his pockets, and your notion of political economy is that such men ought to be put down. Put them down, and you will have no more building. The man that is standing there, apparently doing nothing, is the inspiration of the whole thing. Men in the world—poor, poor men—who have nothing but ideas! If they were to sell bricks, they would eventually retire to detached villas and tennis lawns. But, if they have nothing but ideas,

they retire into the workhouse. A man builds a bridge, and he is a great man; another man puts up a cathedral, and he, too, is a great man. I will not take away one iota from the just fame and honour of such men. We cannot do without them. We should be poor, if we had not such men amongst us. They are the glory of civilisation. But is it nothing to give a man an idea that shall change his life? to tame the tiger-heart and make it gentle as a lamb's? to put into man thoughts, and stir in him impulses, that shall heal him in his sorrows, chasten him in his joys, interpret to him the darkest problems of his life, and hold a light over his way when he passes into the wonderful dark Unknown?

The preacher does not build stone cathedrals. But does he not build temples not made with hands? He cannot say, "See in these mighty stoneworks what I have done"! But he may be able, through God's mighty grace, to say, "Look at that man: once he was the terror of his neighbourhood, the torment of his family, and now he is a strong, pure, kind man." Is that nothing? Stoneworks will crumble; time will eat up the pyramids. But this man, this soul, shall be a glorious unfading light when the world, and all the wondrous works upon it, shall be burned up. Be cheered, then, preacher of the gospel, teacher of the young, obscure one who can only work in the family, giving direction to young thought and young feeling, dropping into the opening heart seeds of Divine truth! Thou art doing a work which, though it cannot be valued by any human figures or by any arithmetic, is prized, and shall be rewarded, by God, who is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and your labour of love.

Life is a dream, a riddle, a mystery, a difficult problem. But there is one Interpreter. What is his name? Where can he be found? His name is Jesus Christ, and he can be found wherever there is a heart that wants him. You have a dream—you cannot call it by any other name—about sin. You know there is something wrong somewhere. You cannot explain it; you cannot set it down in order, proposition after proposition. It is as unsubstantial as a dream and impalpable as a vision. Yet it haunts you, and you want to know more about it. Christ is the Interpreter, and he alone can explain what sin is: show it in its reality,

and give the soul to feel how terrible a thing it is. You have dreams about truth. Sometimes you see an image that you think is the very angel of truth herself. Sometimes that angel comes quite near you, and you are almost on the point of laying your hand on the glittering vision. You cannot quite do so. It leaves you, escapes you, mocks you! Jesus Christ is the Interpreter of that dream. He knows truth, he reveals truth, he sanctifies man by truth, he enriches the human mind with truth, and he alone has the truth. Why? Because he *is* the truth. It is one thing to have a truth. It is then a possession, something to be pointed out and described. It is another thing to *be* the truth. Christ himself had not the truth in our poor sense of the term, for he *was* the truth. He did not so much preach the gospel as *be* the gospel. You are conscious of glimmerings of objects: dreamings about better states of things. You have a moral nature that now and again gives you hints about right and wrong, and truth and falsehood. You have an imagination that will go out beyond the present and the visible. Are you content to be tormented and mocked by these dreamings, half visions, spectral revelations, and tempting fancies? Why not take them all up to the Son of God, and say, "We have dreamed this! We cannot make anything of its harmonies,—anything truly beautiful. Yet we think it ought to be made into something beautiful, because look what glittering pieces there are here—what wondrous shapes, what marvellous adaptations we think there are to be found amongst these pieces." If you go up to him so, he, more readily than ever Joseph or Daniel did, will show you the interpretation of the dream, and will bless you with revelations of what is in yourself, as well as what is in God.

You cannot get on without the interpreter of dreams, without the man of thought, without the inspired teacher, without the profound interpreter of God. I know very well that when you get among your day books and dust of various kinds, you are apt to think you can do without ideas, imaginings, and dreams, and mere thinking. But there are times in your life when you begin to feel that without thought, idea, impulse, emotion, life would be but a mockery, and death itself would be the welcomest guest that ever crossed your threshold. Ho! every one that desires to know the highest thought, and the highest feeling in

the universe,—this can be found only in the book of God and in communion with the Holy Ghost.

“But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house” (xl. 14).

The first touch of humanity we have seen in Joseph: human nature is in this little plea. He would have been far too great a man, if I had not seen this little trace of human nature coming out after all. I have wondered, as I have read along here, that he did not protest and resent, and vindicate himself, and otherwise come out as an injured man. He has been almost superhuman up to this point. Now the poor lad says, “The chain is very heavy, this yoke makes me chafe. I cannot bear this any longer.” And he tells the butler, who has good luck before him, that he would like to be taken out of the dungeon. There are times when we want to find a god even in the butler; times when our theism is too great for us, and we want to get hold of a man,—when our religion seems to us to be too ærial, afar off, and we would be glad to take hold of any staff that anybody could put into our poor trembling hands. This is natural, and I am not about to denounce Joseph, nor to reproach him, as though he had done some unnatural and unreasonable thing. I am glad of this revelation of his nature; it brings me near to him. Though God will not substitute himself by a butler,—but will give Joseph two more years’ imprisonment,—yet God will make it up to him somehow. He shall not want consolation. It was very human to seek to make a half-god of the butler to get out of that galling bondage. We shall see, in the course of our reading, whether God be not mightier than all creatures, and whether he cannot open a way to kingdoms and royalties, when we ourselves are striving only for some little, insignificant, and unworthy blessing.

After this the baker told his dream. He was a long-headed man. He waited to hear how the case would go with the butler, and when he heard all that the butler could know about his vision, he went and told his dream, and Joseph told him, “Within three days thou shalt be hanged.” The interpreter of dreams must not always tell good news. The interpreter must not tell people’s fortunes according to his own ideas. He must do as Joseph did. He must say, “Interpretations are with God. I am

but the medium on which the Infinite Silence breaks into language. It is not in me to tell the meaning of the mystery. It is in God, and with God alone." This is a lesson for preachers of the gospel. It would be a joyous thing to say to every man, "You are right; you are on the road to glory; nothing can stand between you and heaven." That would be a very gracious thing, to say. But if I fail to warn the ungodly man, to tell him that God is angry with the wicked every day, and yet that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked,—that the Son of God has dièd for the sins of the world,—that there is no man too vile to be received and to be redeemed by the Great Sacrifice,—then shall I fail in my mission, and my word of joy for a moment shall be a mockery and a cruel thing, and your pale and reproachful countenance, on the last day, turned upon me, would be an everlasting punishment. No, we must be faithful. There are interpretations that are favourable and helpful; there are interpretations that mean ruin, punishment, death.

May God make his servants faithful, that they may speak the cheering, the life-cheering word; and that they may speak the terrible word with self-restraint and with heart-breaking pathos, that men may begin to feel that there is something in the message that ought to make the heart quake, and turn their minds to devout consideration. To every man's dream, and thinking and scheming about life there is an answer in One alone, and that One is Jesus Christ, son of Mary, Son of God, God the Son, Emmanuel, God with us! He never refuses to have long, long talk, either by night or day, with the man who goes to him tremblingly, devoutly, penitently. Try if this be not so.

Gen. xli. 1.

"And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed ; and, behold, he stood by the river."

PHARAOH'S DREAM.

SHOWING how soon men are led into mystery,—how thin, how flimsy is the veil which separates dust, and visibility, and ordinary things, from the spiritual, the invisible, and, in some senses, the terrible. There is mystery all around us, and ever and anon God gives us a peep into that mystery, that he may tame our impetuosity and call us to considerateness and devoutness. Pharaoh was a mighty man in his day, and yet a dream was too much for his power of interpretation. He had a dream, and it mocked him. He saw strange visions, and they said nothing to him which he could render into intelligible speech. Understand that just before us there is a power of mystery and concealment, a mockery and torment which can unsettle the strongest man amongst us,—can frighten us, and make poor, timorous, trembling creatures of the very sturdiest of us. This shows also the weakness of the greatest men. Pharaoh was king, but kings are not always interpreters. It would not do for one man to be every man. Men would forget themselves if they had at their girdles the keys of all locks. It is enough for some of us to dream, and to be puzzled by our dreams and visions. It would be too much for us if we were our own soothsayers, prognosticators, interpreters, and reconcilers. Every man needs the help of some other man.

Pharaoh is mighty, yet Pharaoh is puzzled by his own dreams. The prime minister for the time being is an influential man, but he might not be able to clean his own watch. The great general and warrior of the day has a renown peculiarly his own, but it might be inconvenient for him to get his own coals in. There is a meaning in these things. A man, though he be a king, wants an interpreter now and then to break into common speech the strange and terrible language which he has heard in the silence of the night-time. So the greatest, proudest man amongst us has, ever and anon, to call in the aid of some apparently little contemptible creature who has nothing but hands, or nothing but physical faculties. Let us learn from this our mutual inter-

dependence, the Divine idea of unionism and reciprocity. We need one another. There is no man in the world, how brilliant soever his genius, how mighty soever his gifts, who does not need the humblest and the poorest creature to make up to him something that is wanting to complete the complement and sphere of his power.

"And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled" (xli. 8).

Showing us the discipline, the instructiveness, which may come out of the Unknown. If life were altogether a known quantity, we should forget ourselves. God recalls us, steadies us, gives us thoughtfulness, considerateness, by reminding us, now and again, that the greatest part of our being is an unknown quantity. Pharaoh was troubled. Why? Because some little rival had lifted his puny fist against his throne? He could have crushed such rivalry almost by a word. Why was the king of Egypt troubled? Because of an *unknown* factor; because of the elements he could not see all round about; because of something that glanced at him and then shut its eyes again swiftly; something that touched him on the shoulder and fled away. It is the same with us. God rules us often by the fear of the unknown. You saw a flash of light in your bedroom last night, after you had retired to rest, and that troubled you, shook you; you had to inquire of others in the morning to know what it was. Great man! poor insect! You thought you heard a voice, and yet there was nobody to be seen, and that chilled your marrow,—you drop your pen and run out into the busy streets, that you may retone your nerves. Ha! so it ever was with you. You could not rest because there was an unexpected glance of light in your room. You thought somebody touched you, and when you looked behind there was no one to be seen. You had a dream which shook your whole nervous system, agitated, disturbed you, made you unquiet and sad. Why? be a man! What was it? A shadow, an impalpability, a dream! You are a man, with your head upon your shoulders, your eyes in your head, with hands and feet, and completeness of physical constitution. Why should you be startled, chilled, afraid, by something that is mysterious, intangible, invisible? Be a man. But you cannot. There is God's power over you. He can frighten you by a

dream; he can startle you, confound you, by an unexpected event or combination of events.

This is my difficulty with some men. They cannot rest till they have done their very utmost to find out the meaning of a dream. They are disquieted until they find out whence came an unexpected shadow, whence issued an unexpected voice. They inquire; they give themselves no rest, until they have answered such difficulties with as great a measure of satisfaction as possible. Yet they care nothing for the subtle temptations that assail the heart, for allurements that seduce the spirit into evil, nor for the unholy thoughts that steal upon their minds and poison the fountain of their highest life. They care nothing for all the Great Unknown, the entrance to which is called "Death." Is this right? Is this reasonable? To be terrified by a vision of the night, and yet to have no care about the infinite, the invisible, the everlasting! Has God no meaning in the little frights with which he sometimes visits us? When he just touches us, as it were, with the finger-tip of mystery,—when he just seizes us for one moment by some sudden fear? Is it not a hint of the unsearchable riches of his mystery and the inexpressible fulness of his resources, whereby he can torment, trouble, slay men? Those who need this exhortation, if such there be, will have but a sorry answer to give to the last great trouble, the one all-inclusive, over-shadowing fear; because by the number of times you have trembled in the presence of unexpected events, by the experience you have had of disquieting dreams, God will charge upon you the capacity of understanding the hints and the monitions which he has given in all the cloud, and mystery, and wonder of your life.

"And he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof; and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh" (xli. 8).

Showing how old schools of thought go out; how old tuitional functions are exhausted; how men who have served their day, after a clumsy and incomplete fashion, are dispossessed, put aside; and with such naturalness and beauty of adaptation of means to ends. God does not say to the magicians, soothsayers, and monthly prognosticators, "Now, your day is done, and you must retire from the field." He simply gives Pharaoh, king of

Egypt, a dream to which they have no answer. Thus the old school drops out, and a new era of thinking, teaching, and interpretation is inaugurated. A man must not keep up old schoolisms, when those isms are no longer the answers to the dreaming day—the strange, novel, tormenting life of the current time. The answers of the men referred to in this verse might have been quite enough in other cases. Up to a given point they might have been wise teachers. They had satisfied the Pharaohs of Egypt from time to time. Yet God lets down a dream from heaven, before which these men retire, themselves saying, “We have no answer to it.” This is how God trains the world. Old answers will not do always to new dreams. Old forms will not always do for new truths, or new aspects of truth, or new inspirations of Divine wisdom. Herein ought we to learn magnanimity, charity, noble-mindedness. I have a dream. Can any man tell me what it is? I have a sorrow at my heart. Can any man tell me where there is balm for such wound? My sin torments me, reproaches me, makes demands upon me which I cannot answer. Is there balm in Gilead? Is there a physician there? There are times when we would give half our kingdom for a *man*. A man of the right force of thought, the right capacity of sympathy, the right tone of music—that wondrous, subtle, penetrating tone, which finds the ear of the soul and charms the spirit into rest and hope! There are plenty of *men*; but is there a *man*? Countless populations; but is there a seer, a man who holds upon his girdle the one key that can unlock the wards of my difficulties and can open the lock of my life? Now there is a Man who professes to answer all questions, solve all problems, dissipate all dreams, and give us a new start in life. You may have heard his name; you may have heard it so often that it has ceased to be a name, and has become a mere sound—a wavelet on the yielding air. It is a sweet name, and yet it is possible for men to have heard it until they cease to hear it. The name is this: Jesus Christ. Have you heard it before? A thousand times! Yet there is not a name in the newspapers of to-day which excites you less than that name. Such may be the experience of some of you. It is a terrible thing to have outlived Christ; to have made Bethlehem, Gethsemane, Golgotha—historic names, spectral shadows! Yet I preach to-day thus:

no man's dream can be solved but by Christ; no man's greatest dreams, Divinest dreams, visions of himself and of the future, can be solved and interpreted but by the son of Mary, Son of God!

"Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day" (xli. 9).

Not his fault in respect of having forgotten Joseph, but his fault in the matter for which he was sent to prison in company with the chief baker. He makes a graceful speech concerning his ill behaviour, and thus introduces to the notice of Pharaoh Joseph, the Hebrew servant to the captain of the guard. The speech of the butler is a speech to which every man ought to give solemn heed: "I do remember my faults this day." Here is the law of association. One thing suggests another, showing how concatenated and interwoven are all the affairs of this life. "I do remember my faults this day." There are days that go back into our yesterdays and make them live again. There are little circumstances that sound, as it were, the trump of resurrection over all our past life, and summon buried things into personality and impressiveness of position and aspect. So it shall be with us all. There will come to us events, which will give recollection, which shall recall the whole chain of our life. There *is* a way of wrapping things up. Let us clearly understand that, lest any evil-minded man should be discouraged, lest any man who has an evil genius should be thrown into despair. Let us remind him that there is a way of doing bad things, wrapping them up with skilful fingers, and putting them away. That can be done. You can easily scratch away a little mould and hide some fault from the light, or some unholy word or mischievous deed, and throw the mould over it again, and then take your staff in hand and walk on. Do not think that your occupation, you bad Othello, is gone! The worst of it is, that some men think that wrapping up a sin is equal to annihilation. They do a bad deed, throw it behind them, look straight on, as if their looking straight on had actually destroyed the deed. We shall come upon events that shall be reminders, upon circumstances that shall turn us round to face the past with all its variegations, its brightness and its shadows, its purities and its corruptions. What an outlook this is for some of us! There are parts of our life we do not like to think about. When we are suddenly reminded of them

we call, Wine! We turn aside a little to some one and say, Play something. There is a time coming when wine and music will have lost their power of enchantment, and we shall be turned right round—forced to look at the past! Oh, sirs! it is then that we shall have no little quibbling, wretched questions to put about Christ's Cross and Christ's atonement. When we see life from that point, and feel the bitterness and torment of sin, we shall then know that the Lamb of God never shed one drop too much of his blood, never suffered one pang too many for the sins of the world. We shall not be critics then, pedants then, little technical inquirers then. We shall feel that the Cross, and that alone, can go right into our life, with the answer to our difficulties, and the balm for our wound and sorrow.

“Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh” (xli. 14).

There are great changes in life. Some of our lives amount to a succession of rapid changes; and it takes a man of some moral nerve and stamina to stand the violent alternations of fortune. Some men cannot bear promotion. It is dangerous to send little boats far out into the sea. Some men are clever, sharp, natty, precise, wonderfully well informed, newspaper-fed and fattened, and yet, if you were to increase their wages just a pound a week, they would lose their heads. That is a most marvellous thing, and yet nobody ever thought he would lose his head with such an increase of fortune. But it is a simple fact, that some men could not bear to step out of a dungeon into a palace: it would kill them. What helps a man to bear these changes of fortune, whether they be down or up? God,—he can give a man gracefulness of mien when he has to walk down, and God can give him enhanced princely dignity when he has to walk up; a right moral condition, a right state of heart, the power of putting a proper valuation upon prisons and palaces, gold and dross. Nothing but such moral rectitude can give a man security amidst all the changes of fortune or position in life. His information will not do it; his genius will not do it. Nothing will do it but a Divine state of heart. It is beautiful to talk to a man who has such a state of heart, when great changes and wonderful surprises come upon him,—when Pharaohs send for him in haste. It is

always a good and stimulating thing to talk to a great man, a great nature, a man that has some completeness about him. It must be always a very ticklish, delicate, and unpleasant thing to talk to snobs, and shams, and well-tailored mushrooms; but a noble thing to talk to a noble man, who knows what prison life is, who knows what hardness of life is, and who has some notion of how to behave himself even when the greatest personages require his attendance. Few men could have borne this change. None of us can bear the great changes of life with calmness, fortitude, dignity, except we be rightly established in things that are Divine and everlasting. You will see that I cannot make too much of Joseph's princeliness of heart and mind when I read the sixteenth verse:—

“And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace” (xli. 16).

A reply that would give him foundation and solidity in the presence of any man. He who draws upon the well-head never has an empty vessel. He who knows himself to be the steward, instrument, medium of God, never has to retract his prophecies or to qualify his teaching. There is a lesson here for those of us who preach. When men ask us to tell the meaning of their life, the answer is not in us, it is in God. When men come to us with great problems, anxious questions, we are not called to put them down and to snub them, as if they had trespassed into forbidden provinces. Our answer is to Pharaoh or Cæsar, the poor man or the lone lost child,—The answer is not in me, the answer is in God. He who rests thus upon God will have new sermons, if he have to preach every hour of the day. He will speak light; his words will be as the omnific fiat of God, “Let there be light,” and man shall stand in a great blaze. Believe me, God has all answers. We have the lock, he has the key. We have the dream, he has the interpretation. What fools, therefore, some of us must be, going about from man to man, saying, “Can you tell me anything about this?” when God waits to be gracious, and bids us welcome to the unsearchable riches of his own wisdom and grace! “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.”

"And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do" (xli. 25).

God does sometimes give hints of his method among men. Not always are they complete hints; simply indications, outlines, shadows of things. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. But if we would fully entertain in our heart of hearts the Holy Ghost, I know not that we should not have more mastery over the future, keener insight into men, events, and purposes. Sure am I of this:—that no man loses anything in clearness of vision, microscopic penetrating insight into character, into history, into events, by living in God and serving God. What God is about to do! Now and then God comes down just to say, "You men are only tenants-at-will; you are not proprietors, you are not even leaseholders. Boast not yourselves of to-morrow!" We should get to think that the wheat-fields and the vineyards were all ours, if the Great Proprietor did not come down now and then and breathe upon them that they should wither away,—if he did not now and then withhold the dew, so that the roots of the earth cannot be nourished,—if, now and again, he did not send a plague through the air to proclaim to men that they hold things but for a moment, and ought to hold them in the spirit of stewardship. So Pharaoh, having had a dream from God, and interpretation from God through the medium of Joseph, was sharp enough to say, "Then if this be the case you are the man for chancellor." Christian people are thought to be very soft-headed people, not thought to have many business notions and business qualifications; great at singing hymns and going to church, but not much in the market-place or on the exchange. I will not reply to that further than to say that it is unworthy of a reply. As if God did not know more about money than we do,—and more about wheat-growing and wheat-storing than we do! as if God knew everything but how to get the morsel of bread for the meal that is due!

Believe ten thousand men when they say that they never knew what it was to have a clear mind, a far-sighted vision, until they knew God, knew Jesus Christ, not as their Creator only, but their Redeemer, their Sanctifier. Religion does not make business men, nor does it give man capacity, faculty. Religion will increase his capacity and refine his faculty. Religion—under-

standing by that term: the religion of Jesus Christ, Son of God, who lived for us, died for us, and rose again for us—never diminishes the quantity of our manhood ; but increases it, refines it, and gives it unity, dignity, and effect.

So we have seen Joseph through what we may term the ill-fortunes. When we come to read about him again, we shall have to turn over a new leaf, on which there seems to be nothing but brightness. Let us, before turning over that new leaf, remind ourselves that there are trials which are *testing*, and other trials that are *punitive*. Many men are distressing themselves, when they think of their trials, by imagining that they must have done something wrong, or God never could have sent such afflictions to them personally or to their household. That is a mistake. There are trials that are simply tests, not punishments ; trials of faith and patience ; not rods sent to scourge men because they have been doing some particular evil thing. God's people are tried. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." The honour is not in the trial, it is in the spirit in which the trial is borne. Take the trial impatiently, with murmuring against God, and we shall be the worse for our trial, the poorer for our suffering. Take the trial as a veiled angel sent by our Father to say things to us which no other messenger could so suitably convey, then even the rod shall be precious to us, and the herald's utterances of God shall have music in them that shall comfort and revive and cheer the heart.

We all have our trials. Pharaoh and Pharaoh's butler and baker, king and subject, preacher and hearer,—every heart has its own bitterness, its own prison hours, its own times of darkness and sorrow and agony. But there is one healing for us all. Jesus knows, knows our frame, remembers that we are but dust ; knows what temptation is in its suddenness, its rapidity, its urgency, its ravenousness. He has promised to be with us when the lion comes, and the bear, and the fierce beast, and when the serpent tempts us, and our poor worn heart is failing for strength. To Christ, Son of the living God, Saviour of all men, let us crawl if we cannot fly ; and the mere turning of our tear-stained eyes towards the place of his dwelling shall be

accepted, as if we had spread out the strongest wings, and outstripped the eagle in our flight towards his presence! Oh, dear Son of God! hold thou us up, and we shall be safe! Hear the people when they say, Amen!

Gen. xli. 46.

"And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt."

JOSEPH'S ELEVATION.

JOSEPH was about seventeen years of age when he went out, at his father's request, to make inquiry concerning the well-being of his brethren. We find from the text that he was now thirty years old. Think of thirteen years being required for the fulfilment of a dream! The Lord counteth not time as men count it. He sitteth upon the circle of eternity. He seems to be always at leisure: though doing everything, to be doing nothing. A thousand years in his sight are but as yesterday, and all time is but as a watch in the night. But what about the effect of this long suspense upon the mind of the dreamer himself? It is hardly any comfort to us to know that God can afford to wait centuries and millenniums for the fulfilment of his purposes. There is another, there is a weaker side to this great question of the dreamer. Here is a young man exiled from his father's presence and the comforts of his home; labouring under the vilest imputations and the gravest suspicions; wasting, as it appears to us, thirteen prime years of his life. What about this waiting on the part of God, so far as Joseph is concerned? See, for example, how likely it was to discourage his faith in things spiritual. The youth had a dream, a vision, granted him as he believed of God; and yet through thirteen years his dream takes no shape, his vision is but a spectre of the memory—not a grand ruling fact of the life. Mark how his faith comes down accordingly. He reasons thus with himself: "Up to this time I have had faith in the God of my fathers. I have believed that dream and vision, strange token and wonderful signal, all meant something in the Divine providence and government of the world. I thought my own dream had a great meaning in it: but I waited

twelve months and nothing came of the dream ; and twelve months more, and my vision was as nothing ; and another year, and I have suffered nothing but ill-treatment,—and all this ill-treatment has come to me through this very dream of mine. Verily, it was but a vexatious nightmare ; or, if a vision of God, it was sent to mock my ambition and to destroy my peace.”

If the young man had run off into some such soliloquy as that, he would be a very mighty man who could justly rebuke him for taking that view of the affairs which constituted so large a portion of his life. It is so with ourselves, my brethren. There are many things which conspire to destroy our faith in the invisible, the spiritual, the eternal. There are daily occurrences which teach us that there is something higher than matter ; yet there are things occurring around us which are perpetually rebuking our trust in the distant, the intangible, the spiritual, the Divine. And who are we, that we should speak to men who for thirteen years have been groaning under heavy burdens, and chide them, as if all the while they ought to have been musical, bright with Divine hope and beauty, and not sad and heavy-hearted, mournful and pathetic in tone ? We should look at such things seriously, with consideration. It is a terrible thing for some men to believe in God ! It takes the whole stress of their nature, and all the help which can come of their personal history and their family traditions, to bind them to the belief that, after all, though God is taking a long time to fulfil their dream, yet he is working it out, and in his own good hour he will show that not a moment has been lost, that all the dozen years or more have been shaped into a peculiar and bright benediction.

Then look at the inferential rectitude of his brethren. Joseph might have turned in upon himself in some such way as this : “ Though my brethren dealt very harshly with me, yet they had keener and truer insight into this business than I had. They saw that I was the victim of a piece of foolish fanaticism. I thought I was interpreting to them a dream of Heaven, a vision of God. When I told my dream they mocked me ; they visited me with what appeared to be evil treatment. But now that I have had thirteen years of disappointment, vexatious delay, and all the consequent embitterment of spirit, my brethren were right after all. They might not have taken, perhaps, the very best

method of showing that they were right ; yet now I forgive them, because they were right on the main issue, and they were called of God to chide my fanaticism, my imbecility and folly." Well, there is a good deal of sound sense in that monologue. It does appear as if the brethren were right and Joseph was wrong. The brethren can turn to thirteen years' confirmation of their view of Joseph's dream. They could say : "Where are his dreams now ? He had a vision of greatness. All the sheaves in the field were to bow down to his sheaf, and all the stars were to make obeisance to him as the central sun. Where are his dreams now ?" It is even so with ourselves. There are views of life which I get that impress upon me this conclusion :—Bad men are right after all. There are what are called "facts," which go dead against the good man's faith and the holy man's prayer. There are men to-day who can tell you that they have prayed and struggled and fought and endured, and for twelve years nothing has come of their holy patient waiting upon God,—nothing that is worthy of being set against the stress under which they have suffered, the discipline that has pained them, the misunderstandings which have troubled and tormented their lives. There have, indeed, been little flecks of light upon their daily course ; there have been little compliments and social courtesies ; but, putting all these things together, they are not worthy to be named in comparison with the poignant anguish that their souls have endured. Yet will not history be to us a tone without language, a messenger without a message, a wasted thing, if we do not learn from this incident that if we have waited twelve years, yet, in the thirteenth, God may open the windows of heaven and pour out upon us a blessing that there shall not be room to contain ? It is not easy to wait. It does not suit our incomplete nature to tarry so long. But we fall back upon history, which is God interpreted, and we find in that an assurance that when the heart is right, the outward circumstances shall be shaped and directed to our highest advantage.

Some men's dreams do take a long time to fulfil. The butler and the baker's dreams were fulfilled in three days. But what was there in their dreams ? Everything depends upon the vision we have had of God. If we have had a butler's dream we shall have a butler's answer. If we have had such a dream as a

great nature only can dream, then God must have time to work out his purposes. Joseph is not the only man who has suffered for his dreams. God oftentimes punishes us by making dreamers of us. Some men would be thankful to-day if they could close nine-tenths of their sensibility,—if they could become leathern or wooden, to a large extent. This power of feeling—of feeling everything to be Divine, and to have a Divine meaning in it : this power of seeing beyond the visible right into the unseen : this power of dreaming and forecasting the future—brings with it severe pains and terrible penalties. Here is a man who dreams of the amelioration of his race. He will write a book, he will found an institution, he will start certain courses of thinking, he will seek to reverse the thought of his contemporaries and turn it all into a directly opposite channel. He sees the result of all this. He tells his dream, and men laugh at him. They say, "It is just like him, you know. He is a very good sort of man, but there is a great deal of fanaticism in him. He has always got some new scheme, and some very beautiful vision floating before him." And men who never dreamed—except it was that their wretched little house was being broken into—feel called upon to snub him with their contempt, and to avoid him as a man who is too good or too clever for this poor common world. What are we to make of history, if we do not get out of it this lesson ?—that there are dreams which God gives, and there are dreams which take a long time to fulfil. We do not make history—we interpret it. God causes the facts to transpire, and he says to us, "Be wise, be understanding : draw the right inferences from these circumstances." But was it worth waiting thirteen years for ? A good deal will depend upon the answer we give to that inquiry. Is there nothing worth waiting thirteen years for ? Some men require twenty-five years' hard, good schooling before they are quite as they ought to be. Other men may require only two days, and they are as sharp and clear as any scholar need be. Others require thirteen years on the treadmill, thirteen years' discipline and scourging, thirteen years' weaning from old affections and old associations. Observe, God was now training a spoiled child, and spoiled children cannot be drilled and put right in two hours. Some of us have been spoiled in various ways. Some

with excess of goodness, and some with excess of harshness, it may be,—yet spoiled. Our nature has got a twist, or we have got ideas which require to be taken out of us; and only chastisement, suspicion, imprisonment, scourging, loss, hunger, affliction, and the very gate of death itself, can bring us to that measure of solidity and tenderness and refinement which God wants, in order to start us on the highest course of our manly service. Was it worth waiting thirteen years for? Yes. All countries, according to the Biblical statement, came to Joseph for food, and all countries came into Egypt to Joseph to buy corn, because that the famine was sore in all lands. He was the feeder of the nations, the father, the preserver, the benefactor of innumerable multitudes! It seems to us to be an easy thing to step into that position. But we do not see the whole case; we do not see the temptations which beset it, the difficulties which combine to form that position; we do not know all the collateral bearings and issues. Let God be judge. He took thirteen years to make this man; and this man was the benefactor, and, under God, the saviour of nations. Why should not we endeavour to learn that lesson? We should like now to be second to Pharaoh. Some of us have the notion that we are tolerably ready, to-day, to receive all the homage which people can give us. That is our mistake. If we wait thirteen years, we shall be better; we shall be stronger and wiser, than we are now. The years are not wasted to souls that make a right use of them. Every year that goes by should lift a man up, give him enlargement of capacity, and tenderer sympathy, and sensitiveness of feeling. So Joseph waited thirteen years. But after he had waited, he went before Pharaoh, and was as Pharaoh to the people of Egypt.

“Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another?” (xlii. 1).

The old man was perfectly innocent: he had no evil tormenting associations with the word *Egypt*. If his sons had heard there was corn many a mile farther off than Egypt, surely these stalwart, active, energetic men would have been off before the old man chided them by this speech of his about waiting and looking upon one another. But, corn in Egypt! Some words are histories. Some words are sharper than drawn swords. Egypt was a keen double-edged weapon that went right into the

very hearts of the men whom Jacob sought to stimulate. Jacob saw only the outward attitude. The sons appeared to be at their wits' end. Jacob thought his children were inactive—had no spring or energy in them; that they had faded away into ordinary people, instead of being the active, strong-limbed, energetic, and, as he thought, high-minded men of old. Men do not show all their life. Men have a secret existence, and their outward attitude is often but a deception. I have seen this same principle in operation in many stations of life. I have seen it in the Church. I have known men, whose interest in the sanctuary has begun to decline, who have been inattentive to the ministry, who have fallen off in their support of Christian institutions, and, when asked by the unsuspecting Jacobs, "Why is this?" they have said "that they do not care so much for the minister as they used to do. There is not food for the soul; they want another kind of thing; and, therefore, until some change has taken place, they must withhold support from this and from that." So the minister has had to suffer: to suffer from unkind words, from chilling looks, from attitudes which could not be reported or printed, but which were hard to bear. And the poor minister has endeavoured in his study to work harder, and to get up the kind of food which such souls—souls!—could digest. He has toiled away, and in six months it has turned out that the wretch who criticised him and made him a scape-goat, was preparing for bankruptcy, and was edging his way out of the Church, that he might do it with respectability and without suspicion. Such a case is not uncommon. It may vary in its outward aspects and the way of putting it. But there are men that seek to get out of duties, and out of positions, by all kinds of excuses, who dare not open their hearts and say, "The reason is in myself. I am a bad man. I have been caught in the devil's snare; I am the victim of his horrible temptation and cruelty." It is the same, I am afraid, with many of you young men in the family circle. You want to throw off restraint. You want to alter this arrangement and that in the family; and you speak of your health, your friends, or some change in your affections. You put altogether a false face and a bad gloss upon the affair, so that your unsuspecting father and mother may not know the reality,—the reality being that your heart is wrong, or your soul

has poisoned itself. You want to be away, to do something that is truly diabolic, and which you would not like those who gave you birth and who have nourished you through life to see. Believe this, that not until the moral is right can the social be frank, fearless, happy. When men's hearts are right they will not have anything to hide. They may have committed errors of judgment, but these have been venial, trifling. But where there is no deep villainy of the heart, men can bear to tell their whole life, and show how it is that they are fearful concerning this, or despondent concerning something else.

This law of association is constantly operating amongst men. A word will bring up the memories of a life-time. You had only to say to ten great-boned men in the house of Jacob—and say it in a whisper—Egypt! and you would shake every man to the very centre and core of his being. If you could have met the oldest, strongest, sturdiest of them on a dark night, and said to him, Egypt! you would have struck him as with the lightning of God. Yes, it is a terrible thing to have done evil! It comes up again upon you from ten thousand points. It lays hold of you, and holds you in humiliating captivity, and defies you to be happy. That this may be so I think is tolerably clear from the twenty-first verse of the forty-second chapter. The men were before Joseph, after they had been cross-examined by him.—

“And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore, is this distress come upon us” (xlii. 21).

Many years after the event! Their recollection of that event was as clear as if it had transpired but yesterday. Learn the moral impotence of time. We say this evil deed was done fifty years ago. Fifty years may have some relation to the memory of the intellect, but it has no relation to the tormenting memory of the conscience. There is a moral memory. Conscience has a wondrously realising power,—taking things we have written in secret ink and holding them before the fire until every line becomes vivid, almost burning. Perhaps some of you know not yet the practical meaning of this. We did something twenty years ago. We say to ourselves, “Well, seeing that it was twenty years ago, it is not worth making any to-do about it; it is past, and it is a great pity to go twenty years back, raking up

things." So it is, in some respects, a great pity to bother ourselves about things other men did, twenty years ago. But what about our own recollection, our own conscience, our own power of accusation? A man says, "I forged that name twenty-five years ago, and oh! every piece of paper I get hold of seems to have the name upon it. I never dip the pen, but there is something in the pen that reminds me of what I did by candle light, in almost darkness, when I had locked the door and assured myself nobody was there. Yet it comes upon me so graphically,—my punishment is greater than I can bear!" Time cannot heal our iniquities. Forgetfulness is not the cure for sin. Obliviousness is not the redeemer of the world. How, then, can I get rid of the torment and the evils of an accusing memory? The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." That is the kind of answer men want, when they feel all their yesterdays conspiring to urge an indictment against them as sinners before the living God. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Can I impress this upon myself and upon you? Time cannot redeem us. Ten thousand ages hence, a man's sin will confront him, scourge him, and defy him to enjoy one moment's true rest. Who then can destroy sin, break its power? Whose arms can get round it, lift it up, and cast it into the depths of the sea? This is a Divine work, God's work! It is not to be done by your ethical quacks and your dreamy speculators. It is to be done only by the mighty redeeming power of God the Son, Jesus Christ! This is the gospel I have to preach to men. Fifty years will make no difference in your crimes. Conscience makes us live continually in the present; and only the blood of Jesus Christ can wash out the stains of evil deed and unholy memory.

"And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required" (xlii. 22).

Showing how bad men reproach one another, how little unity there is in wickedness, what a very temporary thing is the supposed unanimity of bad men,—how bad men will one day turn

upon one another, and say "It was you!" Ha! such is the unanimity of wicked conspirators! "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not"; they will turn against thee some day. Though your swords be pointed against one man at the present hour, and you may be unanimous in some wicked deed,—God's great wheel is going round and round, and the hour cometh when the men who urged thee to do the evil deed, and share with them their unholy counsels, will seek thy heart, will accuse thee, will charge thee with participation in their nefarious, hellish designs and work. The way of transgressors is hard! Smooth for a mile or two, and then hard, thorny—ravenous beasts there, serpents lurking here. It is very difficult to get back when you once start upon that way. I have known young men who have said, "We want to go just a mile or two down this road, and when we find it becomes rather intricate, we intend to turn right round; and then, after all, you will see that we have only been sowing a few wild oats, and just doing a few odd things, and by-and-by we shall settle down into solid men." I am not so sure about it. If a man goes into the evil way, and the great Enemy of souls goes after him, he will blot out his footprints. So when the man says, "I will now go back again; I can put my feet where I put them before," he looks for his footprints, but they have gone, and he cannot tell which is east, west, north, south! Footprints gone; landmarks altered; the whole metamorphosed, and to him downward is upward. None so blind as he, the eyes of whose soul have been put out!

All this, too, was in the hearing of Joseph. Joseph heard them say that he was their brother. They used to call him "dreamer." He heard them say "the child,"—tenderly. Once they mocked him. He heard them speak in subdued, gentle tones. He remembers the time when their harsh grating voices sent a terror through his flesh and blood, and when he was sold off to travelling merchantmen. It was worth waiting for to see further into one another, after such experiences as these. He never would have known his brethren, but for this terrible process. Some disciplines open men's nature and show us just what they are. "His blood is required," said Reuben. Certainly,—such requirements made life worth having. There are pay days.

There are days when bills become due. There are times when business men are particularly busy, because the day has come on which certain things are due and must be attended to. And shall a paltry guinea be due to you or to me, and a man's blood never be due? Shall we be very conscientious about pounds, shillings, and pence, and forget the virtue we have despoiled, the honour we have insulted, the love we have trampled underfoot? God will judge us by our actions, and will charge upon us that we were conscientious in little things, in trivial relationships, and forgot that sometimes man's blood is due, and man's honour comes with a demand to be satisfied.

Gen. xlii. 24.

"And he turned himself about from them, and wept."

JOSEPH'S BRETHREN UNDER TRIAL.

JOSEPH had spoken roughly to his brethren, whom he knew, though they knew not him. He had declared unto them, by the life of Pharaoh, that they should not go forth from his presence, except their youngest brother came with them. Having heard Joseph's decision, they began to reproach one another. They said, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." And Reuben turned the whole thing upon them in a very pointed reproach. He said, "Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required." Joseph understood their speech, though they did not understand the speech of Joseph, because he spake unto them through an interpreter. The interview having come to this point, Joseph turned himself about from his brethren and wept. Harsh experience need not destroy the finest sensibility, the tenderest feelings of the heart. Here is a man who has had twenty years' very painful, almost unendurable, treatment; and yet, at the end of that period, he is susceptible of the tenderest influences, responds emotionally, with tears, with unutterable yearning and tenderness of soul, in the presence of his brethren,

and the mute appeal which was involved in that presence. There is something for us to learn here. Our harsh experiences often deaden our sensibility, work in us a sourness of heart and feeling which becomes misanthropic, selfish, resentful. We learn from the history before us that it is possible to be exiled from home, ill-treated by relatives and friends, thrown into the way of pain, sorrow, loss and desolation ; yet to come out of the whole process tender, sensitive, responsive to appeals which are made to our nature. Why, there are some men who cannot overget the very slightest offence. If they have not their own way in everything, they show their resentfulness in a thousand little ways,—they become peevish, censorious, distrustful, ungenial. You never meet them but they give you to understand that they have been insulted, offended, dishonoured. They have had to endure slight, or contempt, or neglect. How little, how unutterably paltry, such men appear in the presence of the man who, after twenty years of exile, solitude, evil treatment of all kinds, weeps when he sees his brethren,—keeps his heart through it all,—has not allowed himself to become soured or misanthropic ! He keeps a whole, tender, responsive heart through all the tumult, and trial, and agony, and bitter sorrow of thirteen years' vile captivity, and seven years of exaltation which might, by the very surprise it involved, and the very suddenness with which it came, have over-balanced the man's mind and given him false views of himself. If he was great, why should not we be great ? If he could keep a whole heart through it all, why should we allow our moral nature to be frittered and dribbled away ? Why should we become less, instead of greater, notwithstanding the evils we have to endure, and the difficulties which press upon us on every side ? This is a great question, calling men to devout consideration, and to a searching and complete review of their moral position.

After the lapse of many years, Joseph, on seeing his brethren, wept. Why, he might have been vengeful. It is easy for us glibly to read the words, "Joseph turned himself about and wept." But consider what the words *might* have been ! We oftentimes see results, not processes. We do not see how men have had to bind themselves down, crucify themselves—hands, feet, head, and side—and undergo death in the presence of God,

before they could look society in the face with anything like benignity, and gentleness, and forgiveness. What the words might have been! Joseph, when he saw his brethren, might have said, "Now I have you! Once you put me into a pit,—I shall shake you over hell; once you sold me,—I will imprison you and torture you day and night; you smote me with whips,—I shall scourge you with scorpions! It shall be easier to go through a circle of fire than to escape my just and indignant vengeance to-day!" He might have said, "I shall operate upon the law: A tooth for a tooth, and an eye for an eye." That is the law of nature; that is elementary morality. It is not vengeance, it is not resentment; it is alphabetic justice—justice at its lowest point—incipient righteousness. It is not two eyes for an eye, two teeth for a tooth; but an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a blow for a blow, a pit for a pit, selling for selling, and so on. A great many men are perfectly content with elementary morality and alphabetic justice. People do not educate themselves from this kind of righteousness into Christian nobility of disposition. It is not a question of education; it is a question of sanctification. Few men can rise beyond mere justice. Many men find in mere justice all the moral satisfaction which their shallow natures require; they cannot see that mercy is the very highest point in justice, and that, when a man stoops to forgive, he becomes a prince, and a king, and a crowned ruler in the house and kingdom of God. It requires all that God can do to teach men this: that there is something higher than the law of retaliation; that forgiveness is better than resentment, and that to release men is oftentimes—
if done from moral considerations and not from moral indifference—the highest form of Christian justice. But revenge is sweet! I am afraid that some of us like just a little revenge; not that we would ourselves personally and directly inflict it; but, if our enemies could, somehow or another, be tripped up, and tumble half-way at least into a pit, we should not feel that compunction, and sorrow, and distress of soul which, sentimentally, appears to be so very fine and beautiful. Nothing but God the Holy Ghost can train a man to this greatness of answering the memory of injury with tears, and accepting processes in which men only appear to have a part as if God, after all, had been over-ruling and directing the whole scheme.

“And Joseph turned himself about from them, and wept.” Afterwards he left their presence and went into his chamber and wept. Think of the secret sorrows of men! The tears did not flow in the presence of the ten men. The tears were shed in secret. We do not know one another altogether, because there is a private life. There are secret experiences. Some of us are two men. Joseph was two men. He spake roughly unto his brethren. He put it on; he assumed roughness for the occasion. But if you had seen him when he had got away into his secret chamber, no woman ever shed hotter, bitterer tears than streamed from that man’s eyes. We do not know one another altogether. We come to false conclusions about each other’s character and disposition. Many a time we say about men, “they are very harsh, rough, abrupt”; not knowing that they have other days when their very souls are dissolved within them; that they can suffer more in one hour than shallower natures could endure in an eternity. Let us be hopeful about the very worst of men. Some men cannot cry in public. Some men are, unfortunately, afflicted with coarse, harsh voices, which get for them a reputation for austerity, unkindliness, ungeniality. Other men are gifted with fairness and openness of countenance, gentleness and tunefulness of voice. When they curse and swear it seems as though they were half praying, or just about to enter into some religious exercise. When they speak, when they smile, they get a reputation for being very amiable men, yet they do not know what amiability is. They have no secret life. They weep for reputation; they make their tears an investment for a paltry renown. We do not want all our history to be known. We are content for men to read a little of what they see on the outside, and they profoundly mistake that oftentimes. But the secret history, the inner room of life, what we are and what we do when we are alone, no man can ever tell,—the dearest, truest, tenderest friend can never understand. Do not let us treat Joseph’s tears lightly. Under this feeling there are great moral principles and moral impulses. The man might have been stern, vengeful, resentful. Instead of that, he is tender as a forgiving sister. When he looks he yearns, when he listens to their voices all the gladness and none of the bitterness of his old home comes back again on his soul.

"And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us? And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack: and when both they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid" (xlii. 28, 35).

What mistaken views we take about what is called the common-places of life! Some of us are often discontented because of the insipidity of our existence. To-day so like yesterday, and to-morrow will be but a repetition of to-day. We are always wanting something to happen. We say, If anything would but occur to-day to stir the stagnant pool of our life! We want to get out of old ruts and ordinary modes. Here are men to whom something had happened, and they were afraid! We could not live sensationally. Men can bear shocks and sensations only now and then. In life there must be great breadths of common-place and ordinariness. We could not stand a shock every day. It is enough, now and then, to be stimulated and shaken out of what is common and usual, and what has come, by reason of its commonness, to be under-valued and contemned.

They were afraid when they saw their money in their sacks. See the possibility of *mercies* being turned into judgments,—of the very goodness of God striking us in the heart,—of mercy itself smiting us as with the rod of wrath. How can this be so? When the moral nature is wrong, when man's conscience tells him that he has no right to this or that privilege or enjoyment, when man is divided against himself, when he has justly written bitterness against his own memory and his own nature altogether,—then his very bread becomes bitter in his mouth, and the sunlight of God is a burning judgment upon his life. Naturally, one would have said that, when the men saw their money in the sacks, saw that it had been planned, that it was not an accidental thing,—being in one sack and not in another, but being in every man's sack,—when they saw order, regularity, scheme in the whole thing,—they might have said, "We are glad: we have been kindly and nobly treated by the men of Egypt; we are thankful for their consideration." Yet, when they saw the money, they would not have been more surprised if a scorpion had erected itself out of a sack and aimed to strike them in the face. A time will come to bad men when even God's mercies will trouble them,

when the light of the day will be a burden to their eyes, and when the softest music will be more unendurable than the most terrible thunder. Bad men have no right to mercies. Bad souls have no right to be in the pastures of God's richness of love and mercy and compassion. They feel themselves out of place, or they *will* do so. Altogether, sirs, it is a bad look-out for bad men! They cannot find rest anywhere. Put them in the very finest pastures you can find, and there will arise one day in their hearts this accusation: You have no right to be here; your place is in the sandy desert. Put them in the sandy desert, and the very wilderness will be filled with discontent and unrest until the bad men get out of it. Altogether the universe will not want them. God will turn his back upon them! There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

See, further, how small things can upset man's enjoyment, man's pleasure and satisfaction in life. Here is a paltry handful of money in each man's sack, and because of the event there is no rest in the house of Israel that day. Life does not turn upon great events and sublime circumstances. Life, after all, has in it great breadths of repetition. One day is very much like another. It is upon little wheels that great things turn. We undervalue little things. The young man does not care to live to-day, because nothing great or sublime is occurring. He does not know that his very life is hung upon a little thread; that his breath is in his nostrils; that one element thrown into the air he breathes will destroy his animal existence, and that life is such a delicately constructed affair that little things will increase our joy a millionfold, or will utterly consume and destroy our pleasure. How, then, can I get mastery over this life? I don't want to be at the mercy of these little things that occur every day. Is there no means by which I could have a sceptre of rulership and symbol of mastery? Is there no way to the throne, seated on which, I could be calm amid tumult, rich amid loss, hopeful in the midst of disappointment, strong and restful when great things all about me are shaking and tottering to the fall? Yes, there is a way. A way to independence, and mastery, and peace. What is that way? It has a thousand names, but call it now—Fellowship with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. He who sits—through the mercy of the Most High—on the throne of God, sees all

things from God's point of view. He does not grapple with mere details : is not lost amid a thousand mazy ways, but sees the processes of life in their scope, their unity, and their whole moral significance. "Great peace have they that love thy law." "O, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." This alone can give a man steadiness, composure, child-like assurance, and saintly triumph amid breaking fortunes, vanishing enjoyments and comforts, and cause him to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." When he hath brought his work to an end, I shall praise him for the mercy of his judgments, and for the gentleness of his rod.

"And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children : Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away : all these things are against me. And he said, My son shall not go down with you ; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone : if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave " (xlii. 36, 38).

An old man, who does not know what he is talking about ! What does the oldest and best man amongst us know about life ? Jacob is writing a list of his grievances and misfortunes and distresses, and God's angels are looking down upon him and saying that the whole statement, though it is one of what men call facts, is a mistake from beginning to end. Think of a man writing his life, and of God's writing the same life in a parallel column ! Now old Israel is perfectly correct, so far as the story is known to himself. Jacob their father said, "Me have ye bereaved of my children." That is right. "Joseph is not." That is perfectly true, so far as Jacob is concerned, so far as his information extends. "And Simeon is not." That also is literally correct, so far as the absence of Simeon may be regarded. "And ye will take Benjamin away." Precisely so, that is the very thing they have in view. "All these things are against me." It is exactly the same with us to-day. Men do not know what they say when they use words. They do not know the full meaning of their own expressions. They will always snatch at first appearances and pronounce judgment upon incomplete processes. Every day I afflict myself with just the same rod. I know what a fool I am for doing so, and yet I shall do it again to-morrow. There comes into a man's heart a kind of grim

comfort when he has scourged himself well ; when he knows all the while that ten thousand errors are accusing him of a repetition of his folly.

There are men who do not know their own family circumstances, yet they have undertaken to pronounce judgment upon the Infinite ! Some men are very familiar with the Infinite, and have a wonderful notion of their power of managing God's concerns. We seem at home when we go from home. Here is an old man saying, " Joseph is not, Simeon is not, Benjamin is to be taken away. All these things are against me." Yet we who have been in a similar position, though the circumstances have been varied, have undertaken to pronounce judgment upon God's way in the world, God's government, God's purposes. Why do we not learn from our ignorance ? Why do we not read the book of our own folly, and learn that we know nothing, being children of yesterday ? We cannot rise to that great refinement of learning, it would appear. Every day we repeat our follies. It is but a man here and there who has a claim to a reputation for religious wisdom.

How life depends upon single events ! We may say, The old man's life is bound up in the life of Benjamin. There are individuals without whom the world would be cold and poor to us all. You may say, He is but one of ten thousand, let him go,—she is but one of a million, why care so much for her ? We live in ones and twos. We cannot live in a countless population. We live in an individual heart, a special individual, personal love and trust. I cannot carry immensity ! I can only carry a heartful of love. There are men to-day who would not care to look at the sun again if they lost that dear little child of theirs ; men who look at everything through the medium of an only daughter, or an only son ; who would not care for spring, and summer, and golden autumn ; for fortune, position, influence, or renown, if that one ewe lamb were taken away. Life may be focalised to one point of interest, impulse, desire, and purpose. A man's life may be centred upon one individual existence.

Let us understand, however, that Jacob does not *begin* his sorrow with the possible taking away of Benjamin. This is the last sorrow of a series. That is how some of us are worn down in soul, and heart, and hope. It is not because you have had

taken away one thing ; but because that one thing happens to be the last of a series. The great hammer that fell on a block of marble and shivered it,—did that blow shiver it ? No. It was blow upon blow, repercussion. No one stroke did it, though the last appeared to accomplish the purpose. Some of you have had many sorrows. You think you cannot bear the sorrow that is now looking at you through the dark, misty cloud. You are saying, “I should pray God to be spared that sorrow. I have had six troubles : I cannot bear the seventh.” Not knowing that the seventh trouble is the last step into heaven ! Is there no answer to this difficulty of human life that will give satisfaction to souls ? There is one answer. There is a Comforter which liveth for ever. I would not teach—God forbid that I should ever so far lose my humanity as to teach ; for a man can only teach well in proportion as he is a *man*—that we should be indifferent about children and friends, the hearts that we love. I do not want to grow into an independence of human regard, and human trust, and human love ; I do not care to be lifted up into such a position of hazy, heartless sentimentality as to be able to let friend after friend die, and care nothing for the loss. That is not Christianity ; that is a species of the lowest beasthood. There may be men who can see grave after grave opened, and friend after friend put in and covered away, and shed never a tear or feel never a pang of the heart. I would hope there are no such men. I do not teach that Christianity enables us to destroy our feeling, to crush our sensibility, and to be indifferent under the pressure of sorrow. But Christianity does enable us to see the whole of a case. Christianity comes to a man in his greatest losses, and troubles, and bereavements, and says to him, amid his tears, and regrets, and passionate bewailings, “Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die.” Christianity teaches that death is but a variation of life ; that the grave is not the full stop in the difficult literature of human existence ; that when we put away from us the dearest and best things that belong to our hearts, God will bring them back again to us multiplied in strength, and beauty, and freshness.

Some of us require most varied and prolonged humiliation before we are prepared for the highest honours of our life. All these

arrangements and tests on the part of Joseph tended towards the humiliation and the penitence of his brethren. He might instantly have said, "I am Joseph"! They could not have borne it. At once he might have said, "Brethren, I forgive you all." He might thus have done more harm than good. The men required to be tested. They had no right or title to any consideration that came before they were put to scrutiny and criticism. God has a long process with some of us. He has to take away the first-born child, and the last-born, and all between. He has to come in, time after time, and turn the cradle upside down. He has to wither our business, blight our fortunes, and smite us with sore-disease. He has to foil our purposes, break up our schemes, turn our counsel back upon us, and confound us at every point, until we begin to say, What does all this *mean*? He has to make us afraid by day; he has to trouble us by night; he has to turn even his mercies into judgments, before he can bring us to say solemnly, with meaning, This must have some religious intent. What does God purpose by all this various discipline?

Gen. xliv. 1-5.

"And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put every man's money in his sack's mouth. And put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack's mouth of the youngest, and his corn money. And he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken. As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away, they and their asses. And when they were gone out of the city, and not yet far off, Joseph said unto his steward, Up, follow after the men; and when thou dost overtake them, say unto them, Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good? Is not this it in which my lord drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth? ye have done evil in so doing."

JOSEPH'S REVELATION.

HOW wonderfully even *spoiled* children may be developed in those very faculties which are supposed to lie dormant under all the pampering and care-taking of exaggerated parental affection! You have observed, from time to time, how deep, yet how simple, how complete, yet apparently how easy, have been all the plans and schemes which Joseph devised to meet the

exigencies of his trying course. Think of him as the *spoiled* boy with whom we began. The rough wind was not to beat upon him; he was never to get his feet wet; any little thing that his father could do for him was to be done; he was to be coddled, and protected, and saved from every little annoyance; and if there was an extra drop of sweetness for any member of the family it found its way into Joseph's cup. You say, after reading all this, "What kind of a man will he make? Why, if there were any germ in him of manhood at the beginning, it must have been worn out and wasted by such excessive pampering, such ill-spent care and attention, as Jacob's." Yet he comes out of it all sagacious as a statesman, with a wonderful breadth and solidity and substance of character, upsetting all the calculations and notions of people who say that if you take too much care of a boy, pamper a life to excess, you are actually doing more harm than good. Now, let us be clear about that, because there is a particle of truth in that theory. I pause here, if haply my printed words—I dare not say my spoken message—should reach any spoilt child, any over-pampered life. There is no reason why you should not, after all, be a man! Your father's fondling and your mother's caresses need not kill the vigour that God gave you. You may come out of it all a strong and tender, wise and efficient servant of the public. It has been said, too, by those people who observe the ways of men, that oftentimes those who have been most carefully brought up can, when occasion requires, rough it with the best grace, and can do things which excite everybody's wonder. We say, concerning certain boys who have had nothing but confectionery to eat ever since they were born, that have always been kept out of dangerous places, "Depend upon it, when the wind turns into the east, when there is a flood or a fire, when there is some sudden and terrible adversity in their lives, they will be unprepared for such a visitation." And it has turned out that the spoilt child has sometimes been the best man. He has stooped with a grace which has excited the wonder of everybody; he has shown how possible it is, under the covering of decoration and excess of attention, to be cultivating the best strength, and preparing for the wettest day. Some of us, who never had two halfpennies to make a noise with, when we have got into a little prosperity,

and then a little adversity has come sharply and suddenly round upon us,—why, we have grunted and complained, and been pettish and snappish, as though we had been nursed in the very lap of heaven and never set our feet on anything coarser than gold. Oh, be men! Do have a life that domineers over circumstances; that takes the bitterest cups, or the exile's solitude, or the slave's lash, and that says, "After all, I am God's child, and I will live for that dear Father."

"And Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found" (xliv. 16).

Contrast that speech with the scene at the pit's mouth. Can you recall the former scene? They put the boy into the pit, sit down and eat bread, see a party of merchantmen in the distance, suddenly resolve on selling him; and they exchange their brother—body, soul, and spirit—for a handful of shekels, and never say good-bye to the child. But, now, "What shall we say unto my lord?" Judah came near and said, "Oh, my lord." "My lord asked his servants." "And we said unto my lord." Yet once again Judah said, "My lord." It is the same Joseph, it is the same Judah. Such are the alterations which occur in man's life! One great difficulty which some of us feel, is the difficulty of punishing a body of men. It is comparatively easy to punish one man. But it is next to an impossibility to punish a committee. The Church can injure its one poor minister; but what can the minister do in the way of bringing punishment—not vindictive punishment, but righteous retaliation—upon an immoral, corrupt Church, that will do things in its corporate capacity which every individual member would shrink from in horror and disgust?

Joseph has had his task set in this business,—so to work that he can bring the rod down upon the *whole* lot. How is it that we lose our consciences when we join bodies of men? How is it that our moral nature becomes diluted the moment we consent to act upon a committee? How comes it, that the honest man, when he joins a Church, may be persuaded to hold up his hand in confirmation of a resolution which is based on corrupt morals? Yet this may be done. There is in England to-day many a man smarting from resolutions passed by corporate bodies, and yet not

one of the members of these corrupt bodies will come forward and say, "I took my full share of that resolution, and I accept the responsibility connected with it." One hands over the responsibility to another. One man says "he would not have voted for it, just as it stands, but he thought it might have saved something worse." Another says that he "didn't fully understand it: it was made in such a hurry, and passed in such a tumult." And so they go on! But they are breaking one man's heart all the time. God's righteous curse rest upon such foul conspiracy! These are not passionate words. If I have spoken fire, it is because there was fuel enough to light.

So they called him, My lord! my lord—my lord! You cannot redeem your character by paying compliments after the deed is done. No man can redeem himself by too late courtesies. There are civilities which are right in their season, beautiful when well-timed. But they may come at a time which aggravates the old memory and tears open the old sore. This was so long in coming! Let us add up the years, and see how long Joseph was in hearing such words. He was seventeen when he went out first to seek his brethren; he was thirty when he stood before Pharaoh. Thirteen years we have up to this point. Then there were seven years of plenty, during which time Joseph never heard from his brethren. At the end of the seven years, making twenty in all, his brethren began to come before him. So it required something like twenty years to bring about the scene which is now before us. Some interpretations are a long time on the road. Some men have long to nurse their hopes, and to cheer themselves up, thinking that after all God will come. Twenty years is a period which takes the strength out of a man, sucks the very sap out of his power, unless he have meat to eat that the world knoweth not of, unless he knows the way to the well-head and can refresh himself with the springing water. So long in coming, but it came at last! This is it, sirs. The bad man's day is a wasting day. Every moment is a moment ticked off,—it is one fewer. But the good man's day is an augmenting quantity,—knows no diminution. Whilst it wastes, it grows; every passing hour brings the day nearer; and the day of the good man has no sunset. Judah continued to speak with marvellous eloquence and pathos, pleading for the release of Benjamin and

making wonderful use of the old man and the grey hairs. In the thirty-second and thirty-third verses he said :—

“For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. Now, therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord ; and let the lad go up with his brethren ” (xliv. 32, 33).

Showing the possibility of being so very careful about one member of the family and caring nothing about another. Here is Judah pleading for Benjamin as if he were his own child ; yet this same Judah took part in selling another brother. So many of us are only good in little bits ! We have points of excellence. People say about us, “After all, there are some points about him that are tolerably good.” But what is that ? We don't want to be good in points, we want to be good altogether ! Not to love for such reasons as Judah suggested even, in this eloquent and pathetic appeal ; but to be good for goodness' own sake. Not to save some man's grey hairs ; but to honour God's law, and thus to be most profoundly and universally gentle and pathetic.

Then there is a great fallacy underlying all such pleading as Judah's ; at all events, a possible fallacy. We try to compensate for our evil deeds to some people, by being extra-kind to others. Brethren, it cannot be done ! You used your poor friend very ill, twenty years ago, and the memory of it has come upon you again and again. You have reproached yourself, and cursed yourself, for your unkindness, neglect, misapprehension, cruelty ; and, in order to appease yourself, to make atonement to yourself, you have been very kind to some other friend. But you cannot touch the dead one ! all your efforts towards helping Benjamin have had in them some hope of doing something at least towards making up for your cruelty to Joseph. But these efforts have been unavailing. Whilst your friend is with you, love that friend. It is but a short grey day we are together. There ought not to be time for strife, and debate, and harshness, and bitterness. The hand is already laid on the rope that shall ring the knell ! And when the eyes once close in the last sleep they do not open again. It is all over ! Then come pangs, scorpions, poisonings, piercings ! We would give all the world to have another hour—one more short hour—with the dear, dear dead

one! But it may not be. Whatever we may do to survivors and relatives, we do not touch the great and terrible blemish of our past life.

Now I have this question to ask: Is there any means by which I can touch the whole of my life? There is not. "Why," you say, "that is the language of despair." So it is, for you, believe me; and if the despair is settled upon your soul, then you are so far prepared for the gospel, which is this: *You* can find no means of touching all your yesterdays, all your past life; but *God* has found such means. "The blood of Jesus Christ, Son of God, cleanseth from all sin." When we get into the mystery of his Cross, we see how every sin can be met. Believe me, it can be met only by all the mystery of that infinite, unspeakable love. So why should we be endeavouring to reach the past, when we have enough to do to-day? Why should we seek to hold a lifetime, when we cannot keep ourselves right for one hour? What then? I rest on Christ, and go up to his dear Cross, and say, "If I perish, I will perish here, where no man ever yet did perish." May God torment our consciences, raise us to the highest point of self-accusation, remind us of all our neglects, all our harshness, and all our cruelty, till we feel ourselves surrounded by scorpions, by messengers of judgment, and by terrible forces of all kinds: until there be extorted from our hearts the cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Then there shall come out of the Cross a glory which will cast the night of the soul away.

Judah having concluded his speech, we read in the next chapter that Joseph could not refrain himself before all those that stood by him. The room was cleared. Joseph wept aloud, and said unto his brethren, "I am Joseph!" Joseph, and yet more than Joseph. We shall not be the same men twenty years hence that we are to-day. The old name—yet there may be a new nature. The old identity—yet there may be enlarged capacity, refined sensibilities, Diviner tastes, holier tendencies. I am Joseph! It is as if the great far-spreading umbrageous oak said, "I am the acorn"! or the great tree said, "I am the little mustard-seed"! Literally it was Joseph; yet in a higher sense it was not Joseph: but Joseph increased, educated, drilled, magnified, put into his right position. You have no right to

treat the man of twenty years ago as if twenty years had not elapsed. I don't know men whom I knew twenty years ago! I know their names; but they may be—if I have not seen them during the time, and if they have been reading, thinking, praying, growing—entirely different men. You must not judge them externally, but according to their intellectual, moral, and spiritual qualities. To treat a man whom you knew twenty years ago as if he were the same man is equal to handing him, in the strength and power of his years, the toys with which he amused his infancy. Let us destroy our identity, in so far as that identity is associated with incompleteness of strength, shallowness of nature, poverty of information, deficiency of wisdom; so that men may talk to us and not know us, and our most familiar acquaintance of twenty years ago may require to be introduced to us to-day as if he had never heard our name.

But the point on which I wish to fasten your attention most particularly is this: that in human life there are days of *revelation*, when people get to know the meaning of what they have been looking at, notwithstanding the appearances which were before their eyes. We shall see men as we never saw them before. The child will see his old despised mother some day as he never saw her. And you, young man, who have attained the patriarchal age of nineteen, and who smile at your old father when he quotes some trite maxim and wants to read a chapter out of what he calls the Holy Bible, will one day see him as you have never seen him yet. The angel of God that is in him will shine out upon you, and you will see whose counsel you have despised and whose tenderness you have contemned. We only see one another now and then. Sometimes the revelation is quick as a glance, impossible to detain as a flash of lightning. Sometimes the revelation comes in a tone of unusual pathos, and when we hear that tone for the first time we say, "We never knew the man before. Till we heard him express himself in that manner, we thought him rough, and coarse, wanting in self-control, and delicacy, and pathos; but that one tone! Why, no man could have uttered it but one who has often been closeted with God, and who has drunk deeply into Christ's own cup of sorrow."

Joseph made a more eloquent speech than Judah had done. He

said to his brethren in the course of his address : "So, now, it was not you that sent me hither, but God." The great man is always ready to find an excuse for the injury that is done him, if he possibly can find one ! This grand doctrine is in the text : that all our little fightings, and scratchings, and barterings, and misunderstandings : all our tea-table criticisms of one another, and magazine articles in mutual depreciation : all our little schemes to trip one another up, and to snip a little off each other's robe, all these things are after all secondary and tributary. "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice."

"Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them : and after that his brethren talked with him" (xlv. 15).

A day of reconciliation ! A family made one. Brethren coming together again after long separation. It is a beautiful picture. Why should it not be completed, where it needs completion, in our own day amongst ourselves ? Ministers sometimes have misunderstandings and say unkind things about one another—and exile one another from love and confidence for years. Is there never to be a day of reconciliation and Christian forgetfulness of wrong, even where positive wrong has been done ? Families and households often get awry. The younger brother differs with his elder brother,—sisters fall out. One wants more than belongs to him ; another is knocked to the wall because he is weak ; and there come into the heart bitterness and alienation, and often brothers and sisters have scarce a kind word to say of one another. Is it always to be so ? Do not merely make it up, do not patch it up, do not cover it up,—go right down to the base. You will never be made one, until you meet at the Cross and hear Christ say, "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." It is in Christ's sorrow that we are to forget our woes ; in Christ's sacrifice we find the answer to our sin ; in Christ's union with the Father we are to find all true and lasting reconciliation. But who is to begin ? That is the wonderful question that is often asked us. Who is to begin ? One would imagine that there were some very nice people about who only wanted somebody to tell them who was to begin. They want to be reconciled, only they don't know *who* is to begin. I can tell you. *You* are ! But I am the eldest,—

yes, and *therefore* ought to begin. But I am the youngest. Then why should the youngest be obstinate? Who are you that you should not go and throw yourself down at your brother's feet and say, "I have done you wrong, pardon me"? Who is to begin? You! Which? Both! When? Now! Oh, beware of the morality which says, "I am looking for the opportunity, and if things should so get together——" Sir, death may be upon you before you reason out your wretched casuistry; the injured or the injurer may be in the grave before you get to the end of your long melancholy process of self-laudation and anti-Christian logic.

Gen. xlvii.-xlix.

THE LAST DAYS OF JACOB.

WE have seen Jacob a runaway, a stranger, a hireling, and a prince having power with God. His deceptions, his dreams, his prayers, his visions, are now closing; and the sunset is not without gorgeousness and solemnity. Every sunset should make us pray or sing; it should not pass without leaving some sacred impression upon the mind. The dying sun should be a teacher of some lesson, and mystery, and grace of providence. We shall now see Jacob as we have never seen him before. Who can tell but in the splendours of the sunset we shall see some points and qualities which have been heretofore concealed? Some men do seem to live most in their dying; we see more of them in the last mysterious hour than we have seen in a life-time; more goodness, more feeling after God, more poignant and vehement desire for things heavenly and eternal. How is this to be accounted for? Base hypocrisy is not the explanation. We may be too ready to find in hypocrisy the explanation of death-bed experiences. Is there not a more excellent way,—a finer, deeper, truer answer to the enigma of that sacred and most tragical moment? Who can tell what sights are beaming on the soul, what new courage is being breathed into the heart, timid through many a weary year? Who can tell what the dying see? *We* have yet to die! Even Christ was revealed by the Cross. We had not known Christ without the crucifixion. The agony came into his prayer when the trouble came into his soul.

The history is a simple one, yet with wondrous perspective. Seventeen years did Israel dwell in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen, and when he was a hundred and forty and seven years old, the time drew nigh that Israel must die. Who can fight the army of the Years? Those silent soldiers never lose a war. They fire no base cannon, they use no vulgar steel, they strike with invisible but irresistible hands. Noisy force loses something by its very noise. The silent years bury the tumultuous throng. We have all to be taken down. The strongest tower amongst us, heaven-reaching in its altitude, must be taken down—a stone at a time, or shaken with one rude shock to the level ground:—man must die. Israel had then but one favour to ask. So it comes to us all. We who have spent a life-time in petitioning for assistance have at the last but one request to make. “Take me,” said one of England’s brightest wits in his dying moments, “to the window that I may feel the morning air.” “Light, more light,” said another man greater still, expressing some wondrous necessity best left as a mystery. “Bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt,” said dying Jacob to his son Joseph, “but bury me in the burying-place of my fathers.” What other heaven had the Old Testament man? The graveyard was a kind of comfort to him. He must be buried in a given place marked off and sacredly guarded. He had not lived up into that universal humanity which says—All places are consecrated, and every point is equally near heaven with every other point, if so be God dig the grave and watch it. By-and-by we shall hear another speech in the tone of Divine revelation; by-and-by we shall get rid of these localities, and limitations, and prisons, for the Lion of the tribe of Judah will open up some wider space of thought, and contemplation, and service. With Joseph’s oath dying Jacob was satisfied.

Now we come upon family scenes. Joseph will have his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim blessed, and for so sweet an office Israel strengthened himself and sat upon the bed. What hints of life’s mystery are there! The courteous old gentleman strengthened himself when he heard that princely Joseph was coming with his sons. How we can whip ourselves up to one other effort! How we can just blow the smouldering embers into a little flash and flame—one last sparkle! the effort of

desperation. Now the old man will tell his life-story over. We wonder how he will *begin*, and where. It is a delicate matter to be autobiographical. Jacob is about to look backwards, and to relate the story of his own earthly career. Where will he *begin*? There are some graves we dare not rip open. What will he tell Joseph about his own early life? To the last he is a kind of inspired schemer; to the last he knows where to draw boundary lines, how to make introductions and exceptions. He will tell about the old blind Isaac? No. He will say how he ran away from Esau whom he had supplanted? No. What will he say then by way of beginning? He will begin at the *second birth*. That is where we, too, are called to begin. Do not celebrate the old natural fleshly birthday—that was in reality death-day. Jacob will begin where he himself truly began to be, “God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me.” What a subtle narrator! What a gift in history! Not a word about the old homestead and old doings; but beginning with regeneration, when he threw off the old man and started up—though with some rudeness of outline needing infinite discipline—into a brighter, larger self. This is a mystery in Providence as revealing itself in the consciousness of the redeemed and sanctified soul. We should be in perpetual despair if we went back to our very earliest doings, and bound ourselves within the prison of our merely fleshly and earthly memories. Each of us has had a Luz in his way. Surely every soul calling itself in any degree right with God, or right in its desires at least towards God, has had a vision-place and a vision-hour,—a place so sacred that other places were forgotten in its memory: an hour so bright that all earlier hours absorbed their paler rays in its ineffable effulgence. Now are we the sons of God. We began our true life when God began his life within the soul. So this well-skilled autobiographer will say nothing about other times. God himself has promised never to mention them to us. He says,—Come, now, and we will gather up the sins as into one great stone, and plunge it into the infinite depths, and the billows shall keep it concealed for ever. We must not drag back the memory to days of murder, dissipation, blasphemy, and all wickedness. We begin our life where God began the life of the soul. Now, being free at the beginning, Jacob is eloquent. After

getting over some sentences how the soul can flow away in easy copious speech ! He told how Rachel died in the land of Canaan when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath, and how he buried her in the way and set a pillar upon her grave which he meant to stand evermore, thinking that all ages must weep over the woman whose soul departed as she travailed in birth with Benoni. Heedless ages ! The pillars of the dead have no sanctity in their cold eyes, yet it does us good to think that many will cry about the spots which mark our own heart-break. Surely every man must cry where we cried ; surely our tears have consecrated some places ; surely no fool can laugh where our soul nearly died.

Now a scene occurs which must have had the effect of a moral resurrection upon dying Jacob. Joseph set his sons in the order of their ages. He was so far a technicalist and a pedant that he would keep up the well-known law of succession by primogeniture. But Jacob guided his hands wittingly and crossed them so as to violate that sacred law. Joseph was displeased and said "Not so, my father, but otherwise" ; and Jacob said "I know it, my son, I know it ; but this is right." Who can tell what passions surged through his own soul at that moment ? What is this duplication of one's life ? What is this sudden embodiment of shadows standing up and confronting us in a silence more terrible than accusatory speech, our other-selves, strange shadow-memories, actions which we could explain but may not : benedictions which express a philosophy which we dare not reveal in terms ? A wonderful life is the human life—yea, a life within a life, a sanctuary having impenetrable places in it. Others may see some deeds or shadows of deeds upon the window as they pass by, but only the man himself knows what is written in the innermost places of the silent soul.

Israel is now in a mood of benediction. We need but to begin some things in order to proceed quite rapidly and lavishly. So Jacob will now bless his own sons. We must read the benedictions as a whole. Months might be spent in the detailed analysis and criticism of the blessings, but even that detailed examination would leave us in almost total ignorance of the real scope and value of those benedictions as revelations of the quality of the mind and heart of the man who pronounced them. What a mind

was Jacob's, as shown in the various blessings pronounced upon his children ! How discriminating those now closing eyes ! How they glitter with criticism ! How keen—penetrating, even to the finest lines of distinction ! Surely what we see in those eyes is a gleam of the very soul. This is no joint salutation or valediction ; this is no greeting and farewell mixed up in one confused utterance. This is criticism. This is the beginning of a career of mental development which is the pride of human education and culture. How affectionate too ! In nearly every line there is some accent of affection peculiar to itself. And how prophetic ! The ages are all revealed to the calm vision and sacred gaze of this man who is more in heaven than upon earth. But this prophecy is no phantasy. We have accustomed ourselves now to a definition of prophecy which enables us in some degree to understand this way of allotment and benediction. Prophecy is based on character. We have already defined prophecy as *moral prescience*. Retaining the definition, we see in this instance one of its finest and clearest illustrations. This is no fancy painting. It is the power of the soul in its last efforts to see what crops will come out of this seed and of that ; it is a man standing upon fields charged with seed, the quality of which he well knows, forecasting the harvest. Moral prophecy is vindicated by moral law. There was no property to divide. There was something better than property to give. What a will is this ! It has about it all the force of a man being his own distributor—not only writing a will like a testator, which is of no force until after the testator's death, but already enriching his sons with an inheritance better than measurable lands. What have you to leave to your children ? to your friends ? You could leave an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away,—bright memories of love, recollections of sacred sympathy, prayers that lifted the life into new hope, forgiveness that abolished the distinction between earth and heaven, and made pardoned souls feel as if they had seen their Father in heaven ; great will : eternal substance.

How Jacob's conscience burned up in that sacred hour ! He remembered the evil of his sons. He reminded Reuben of what he had done ; he recalled the deed of shame, never to be spoken aloud by human tongue, wrought by Simeon and Levi in the land of

Hamor the Hivite; and because their anger was fierce and their wrath was cruel, he divided them in Jacob and scattered them in Israel. "The evil that men do lives after them." Simeon and Levi had forgotten what they did in their sister's case. Jacob had not. In such a malediction there are great meanings, even so far as Jacob is concerned. Jacob knew the cost of sin. Jacob knew that no man can of himself shake off his sin and become a free man in the universe. The sin follows him with swift fate, opens its mouth like a wolf and shows its cruel teeth. No man can forgive sin. Who but God can wrestle with it? We fly from it, try to forget it; but up it leaps again, a foe that pursues unto the death, unless some Mighty One shall come to deal with it when there is no eye to pity and no arm to help. But presently Jacob will come to a name that will change his tone. How some faces brighten us! How the incoming of some men makes us young again! Jacob we have never seen until he comes to pronounce his blessing upon Joseph.

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: the archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: the blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren" (xlix. 22-26).

We read this as a speech of words: it came from the original speaker like a sacrifice of blood. What a marvellous poem! How judgment blazes in it in certain directions! "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him." They have hamstrung this noblest of the offspring of Israel. Did the "old man eloquent" look round upon the brethren as he said this: "and blessings shall be upon the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren"? What sharp darts fell upon the consciences of the listeners! There are benedictions that are judgments. We encourage some men at the expense of the destruction of others. Words have atmosphere, perspective, relations that do not instantly appear upon the surface of the

speech. The singing of a hymn may be a judgment to some who hear it; a kind word may awaken burning memories in many consciences. We cannot tell what we say. We cannot follow the whole vibration which follows the utterance of our speech.

Now let Israel die. Bury the old man where he would like to be buried. Wherever such a man is buried, now that God has wrought the evil out of him, sweet flowers must grow;—Eden must begin.

Gen. xlv. 9-11.

“Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast. And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.”

JOSEPH'S DEATH.

JOSEPH was still a *son*, though lord of all Egypt. He had still an affectionate heart, though pomp and circumstance conspired to give him great eminence and wonderful power in the whole land of his enforced adoption. A man should never forget his father. Twenty years afterwards and more, Joseph's heart yearned after his father with all a child's clinging trustfulness and unsophisticated trembling pathos. A man should always be a boy when his father is at hand. Did I say always? Alas! I am compelled to add that there are circumstances under which fathers cease to be fathers. There may arise such combinations of circumstances as shall dispossess a man of his fatherhood, that shall turn him into a stranger and an alien. It is well, therefore, for us, whether fathers or children, clearly to understand this matter. Nothing but moral considerations should ever separate a father and his child. Not because the father is poor should the child disown him or treat his name lightly; not because he is destitute of learning should a child affect to condemn his parent. But when the father is morally corrupt,—when all the rain, and sunshine, and dew, and living breeze of a child's long-continued patient love have been

lost upon him,—then there may come a time of final separation, when the child says, “I have no father.” What is animal parentage, after all? You say you are a man’s father: but what is the meaning of that? If that fatherhood is but fleshly, it is not parentage in any deep, tender, lasting sense of the term. It may be a relationship that can hardly be helped,—an external temporary relationship; there is no kinship enduring that is not moral. It is when souls are akin that fatherhood and sonship, brotherhood and sisterhood, are established. It may come to be the same thing with the son. There are fathers who have been compelled to shut the door on their own sons, and did not do so lightly; it was not for the first offence,—it was not until every hope had been disappointed, every godly desire had been repulsed and mortified, and all the volume and passion of human love had been repelled and scorned and blasphemed. Blessed are they who would for ever keep all family relationships, all tender kindreds, fresh, blooming, bright! If they would do so they must live in Christ,—their centre must be fixed upon the eternal love of the One Father. Then they will never outgrow their affections; they will be young for ever, responsive to the voice of love, always sensitive, tender, good.

A very beautiful speech is this which Joseph makes concerning his father. “Say unto him, God hath made me lord of all Egypt; therefore the bond between us is cut. Say to him, I disown my relationship to a shepherd: a man living in the bush, keeping flocks and herds, and wandering about from place to place. Say I am lord of all Egypt, and to come within the circle of my influence is to be blinded and dazzled by my glory.” What a chivalrous, filial, beautiful speech! But, fortunately, we have put that speech into Joseph’s mouth. Yet how well it would come after the introduction, “Say unto him, I am lord over all Egypt.” But that is not the message. You would say, you who had not read it, but only heard it, “It sounded very like that.” So it did, but it was perfectly different from that. The speech reads: “Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt.” It is the word *God* that saves the speech, that makes it musical, that gives it high tone and noble bearing, profound and gentle meaning. If Joseph had said, “Tell my father I am lord over all Egypt,” I should have expected a

different ending to the speech. But when a man's greatness—whatever it be, political, social, or religious—is all traced to God, out of that one consideration will come wisdom, and nobleness, and pathos. Always depend upon a man who finds in God the Redeemer of his soul, the Elevator of his circumstances. Religion never made a man haughty; Christianity never made a man unendurable. There have been many great men,—self-conceited, dangerous to go near, self-important,—always standing upon what they call their dignity; but they did not know what it was to live in God and to live for Christ, and to exert their influence from the elevation of the Cross. My young friend on the way to eminence, having a sceptre of wide influence just in view, seeing thy way clear to ten thousand a year and many accessories to thy greatness and stability, know this: that thy throne will have but a tottering foundation if it rest anywhere but upon the omnipotence and all-graciousness of God.

The next point arises in connection with Jacob's receipt of the intelligence:—

"And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father, and told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: and Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die" (xlv. 25-28).

Observe, in the first instance, the old man's heart fainted, for the news was to him too good to be true. There is in life an element which is continually upsetting probabilities,—thus calling men up from lethargy, from that flatness, staleness, and unprofitableness of existence which would necessarily predominate if there was nothing strange, sensational, and romantic in our human relationships and in the events by which we are surrounded. Now and then we require to be startled a little. Men do us good who rouse us. The preacher who makes me shake does me good,—who gives me a new view of truth, who rouses me out of my indifference, who gives me to feel that as yet I know next to nothing. So in daily life, things that are common sometimes flame up before us into new significance, and old ruts seem sometimes to have new spikes of grass and new roots coming out of them. These things call us away from apathies

that would benumb and deaden the soul. But we cannot always live in the wonderful. It is there that so many persons get wrong. You cannot live upon champagne ; you cannot live upon luxuries ; you cannot live healthily upon sensation. You must have something substantial, real, deep, vital,—something that touches the profoundest experience of your life, the inmost consciousness of your spirit, and that follows you through all the engagements of the day. You must have the practical, as well as the imaginative ; you must have the substantial, as well as the poetical. I believe in the airy dream ; I believe also in the solid rock. I like to look on the far-flashing cross that surmounts the great pile ; but let me remember that yonder cross never would have blazed in the rising or setting sun if there were not somewhere the great strong foundation upon which it is rested.

So though the news was too romantic for Jacob, though it caused him to fall into a swoon, yet the old man, who always had an eye for the practical, looked up, saw the waggons, and his heart revived. We must have waggons as well as poems. It is a sad and vulgar thing ; but we must have the substantial, the tangible, and the appreciable, as well as the metaphysical, the transcendental, the mystical, the bewildering, and the grand. It is even so in the religious life. The long prayer must be succeeded by the noble deed. The bold theological statement must be flanked and buttressed, or otherwise supported by unchallengeable morality. What if a man says he believes in God and his deeds be ungodly ? what does his belief in God do for him ? What if a man says “ I have faith,” and have no works ? What if a man preach the gospel and be not *himself* the gospel ?

The brethren had good news for their father. But beyond the good news there must be something else to bring it near to his appreciation. You require to meet men according to their circumstances. God must himself become man before he can touch us and get his mighty redeeming hold upon us ; for we know not the infinite except as it be accommodated to us through the medium of Christ's dear personality, except as it be focalised in the one redeeming life. What did Jacob say when power of speech returned to him ? “ It is enough ; Joseph is yet alive.” What did his brethren say about his being in Egypt ? They said he was *governor* over all the land of Egypt. Joseph sent word

that he was *lord* over all the land. Jacob said, "He is alive!" A man cannot live upon lords, and governors, and fine eminent personages, in their merely official capacity. There are times when we strip away all ribbons, and flowers, and decorations, and other trumperies, and go right into the life and heart of things. Why, if they had said to Jacob, "Joseph is yet alive: we found him lying in the hedgeside, just alive, with hardly anything to cover him,—a poor, lonely, forlorn wanderer"! would that have made any difference to Israel? Would he not just as much have yearned for his child? Let us hope he would. There are times, I repeat, when we want to know about the life rather than the condition. A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Whatever Israel's feelings might have been concerning Joseph, had the statement of the circumstances been other, let me preach this glorious gospel: God does not ask whether we be lords, potentates, or governors; but whether we have turned our poor dying eyes towards our abandoned home. The moment he hears—and he always listens—the soul say, "I will arise and go to my Father," he comes to meet us, to anticipate the statement of our sin and penitence, and to clothe us with his unsearchable riches. Men cannot believe that. It is at that point that souls are ruined by the million. They want to send word to him that they are lords over the land and governors over their circumstances; that they can maintain themselves pretty well, after all; but, if he likes to meet them on an independent basis, they will hold an interview with Almighty God. He will not accept that challenge. He does not know us when our heads are lifted up in that insanity. It is when we are nothing and have nothing, and *know* it, and turn our poor disappointed, shattered hearts towards his dwelling-place, towards the Cross of Christ, that he meets us with the infinite fulness of his pardon, and all the assurance of his willingness to save.

Then the third point brings up the meeting between Joseph and his father:—

"And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive" (xlv. 29, 30).

A beautiful combination of official duty and filial piety! The whole land of Egypt is suffering from famine. Joseph is the controller and the administrator of the resources of the land. He does not abandon his position and go away to Canaan; but he gets the chariot out, and he must go part of the road. "I know I am father to Pharaoh and all his great people. I shall not be away long; I shall soon be back again to my duties. I must go a little way to meet the old man from home." Yes, I do not care what our duties are, we can add a little pathos to them if we like; whatever be our lot, we can add a little sentiment to our life. And what is life without sentiment? What are the flowers without an occasional sprinkling of dew? It may be a grand thing to sit on a high stool and wait till the old man comes upstairs. But it is an infinitely grander thing, a "lordlier chivalry," to come off the stool and go away to meet him a mile or two on the road. Your home will be a better home—I do not care how poor the cot—if you have a little sentiment in you, a little tenderness and nice feeling. These are things that sweeten life. I do not want a man to wait until there is an earthquake in order that he may call and say, How do you do? I do not want a man to do earthquakes for me. Sometimes I want a chair handed, and a door opened, and a kind pressure of the hand, and a gentle word. And as for the earthquakes, why—wait until they come!

What a beautiful picture of reunion is this! "He fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while." See them there! The old man not speaking, because he cannot speak,—speaking most because saying nothing. Joseph not speaking for some time. Only weeping upon one another! Then Jacob, not wanting the thing to be spoiled, says, "Now the next thing, the next thing, Joseph, must be heaven! Whatever comes after this will be an anti-climax. Now let me die!" It was as old Simeon spake when he saw the Child of God, "Now let thy servant depart in peace." We do now and again in life come to points we do not want to leave. We say, "Lord, let us build here." But the Lord says, No, not here, because there is a lunatic at the foot of the hill; and you must not build and put yourself into nice places, and settle down, until you have seen whether you cannot heal the lunacy that is in the world below.

I cannot look upon those two men together without feeling that moral gulfs may be bridged. Joseph was no prodigal son. But, as I see Joseph and his father resting on each other, and weeping out their joy, I cannot but think of that other and grander meeting, when a man who has been twenty years away from God, or fifty years away from all that is true and beautiful in moral life, finds his way back! He does not go in a chariot or walk uprightly, but crawls on his bare hands and knees; and God meets him, lifts him up, and when the man begins to tell "how poor and—" God hushes him with a great burst of forgiving love! It seems as if God will never allow us to finish the statement of our penitence. It is enough for him that we begin the story, punctuating it with sobs and tears. He causes the remainder of the statement to go down in the ocean of his love, in the infinitude of his mercy! Is there to be any home-going to-day? Is any man going to say, "I will arise and go to my Father"? Go! He calleth thee,—poor old pilgrim, grey-headed, burdened, sinful, self-aborring! Go! And thou shalt come out no more for ever!

The fourth point arises in connection with Jacob's introduction to Pharaoh:—

"And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage" (xlvii. 7-9).

It is very tender, pathetic, and instructive to hear an old man sum up his life. How did Jacob sum up his earthly course? He said it was a "pilgrimage." He had been going from place to place, hardly ever resting, always on the move, scarcely ever taking off his sandals, scarcely laying down his staff. Life is a pilgrimage to us. We are strangers here; we have no continuing city here. Jacob also said that the days of the years of his life had been few! Think of a man over a hundred years of age saying that his days had been few! They are few when looked back upon. They seem so to run into one another as to make but a moment. You look a hundred years ahead, and you cannot endure the thought of existing, under present circumstances, so long a time. Yet, if

you could go to the end of the century and look back upon the vanished days, you would say they had been few. Jacob said that not only the days had been few but evil. We get to see the brokenness of life, its incompleteness, its fragmentariness, when we get through it. But when it is all over, and the old man looks back, he says, "Evil have been my days. If not morally evil altogether, if here and there there are signs of holiness and trust in God,—yet, looked at as a whole, my life has been a poor structure; my days have been evil; I have been wanting in effective work. There is not one word of self-praise I can claim, when I look back on the days of my pilgrimage."

Now we come to the last scene of all—to the close of this strange eventful history. "Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation." Joseph died! Then after all, he was but mortal, like ourselves! It is important to remember this, lest we should let any of the great lessons slip away under the delusion that Joseph was more than man. We have seen fidelity so constant, heroism so enduring, magnanimity so—I had almost said—Divine, that we are apt to think there must have been something more than human about this man. No. He was mortal, like ourselves. His days were consumed, as are our days; little by little his life ebbed out; and he was found, as we shall be found, dead. So, then, if he was but mortal, why cannot we be as great in our degree? If he was only a man, why cannot we emulate his virtues, so far as our circumstances will enable us to do so? We cannot all be equally heroic and sublime. We can all be, by the grace of God, equally holy, patient, and trustful in our labour.

Joseph died! Thus the best, wisest, and most useful men are withdrawn from their ministry! This is always a mystery in life: that the good man should be taken away in the very prime of his usefulness; that the eloquent tongue should be smitten with death; that a kind father should be withdrawn from his family circle; and that wretches who never have had a noble thought, who do not know what it is to have a brave, heavenly impulse, should seem to have a tenacity of life that is unconquerable; that drunken men and hard-hearted individuals should live on and on,—while the good, the true, the wise, the beautiful, and the tender, are snapped off in the midst of their days and

translated to higher climes. The old proverb says, "Whom the gods love die young." Sirs! There is another side to this life, otherwise these things would be inexplicable,—would be chief of the mysteries of God's ways. We must wait, therefore, until we see the circle completed before we sit in judgment upon God.

Joseph died! Then the world can get on without its greatest and best men. This is very humiliating to some persons. Here is, for example, a man who has never been absent from his business for twenty years. You ask him to take a day's holiday, go to a church-opening, or to a religious festival. He says, "My dear sir! Why, the very idea! The place would go to rack and ruin if I was away four-and-twenty hours." It comes to pass that God sends a most grievous disease upon the man,—imprisons him in the darkened chamber for six months. When he gets up at the end of six months, he finds the business has gone on pretty much as well as if he had been wearing out his body and soul for it all the time. Very humiliating to go and find things getting on without us! Who are we? The preacher may die, but the truth will be preached still. The minister perishes,—the ministry is immortal. This ought to teach us, therefore, that we are not so important, after all; that our business is to work all the little hour that we have; and to remember that God can do quite as well without us as with us, and that he puts an honour upon us in asking us to touch the very lowest work in any province of the infinite empire of his truth and light.

When few die we can name them one by one,—count them on our fingers. "Joseph died." Some deaths are national events. Some deaths are of world-wide importance. "And all his brethren." There we begin to lose individuality. Death is coming upon us now quicker. We have no time to go through them,—Judah, Simeon, Reuben, and so forth. "All his brethren, and all that generation." Death is mowing them down! You have no time to read their names and pick each out individually. Such is death! Crushing up one generation in one grasp; mowing down the next with one swing of the scythe. We cannot all, therefore, be equally conspicuous; each cannot have his name written in history as having died. Some of us will be classed in dozens. "All his brethren," and no name left! Others of us

will not even be known as families and households. We die as parts of a generation,—a great crowd, an innumerable body ! What of it ? The thing is not to leave a name behind us—a mere name. It is to leave behind influences that hearts will feel, memories that will be cherished at home, and that will be blessed by those whom we have served and helped in life. Die ! The time will come when men will laugh at death. We shall one day get such a view of the universe, that we shall look down upon death, and say, “O death, where is thy sting ?” How so ? Jesus Christ abolished death. If we believe in him, death will no longer be to us a spectre, a ghost, an ugly guest in the house, sucking out our blood and darkening our future. It will then become a swinging door,—and, as it swings, we shall pass in to light, to music, to rest. Death will always be a frightful thing to the man who has no Saviour. Death must be more or less a terror to every man who is not in Christ. He may have lived himself into that measure of beasthood that will not confess terror. I never knew of a felled ox, saying, “Death is very terrible.” So there are some men who have lived themselves down so beastward and devilward that they hardly know death from life. But to a man who has any consciousness of right and wrong, any moral sensitiveness, if he have not God in the house, death must be an unwelcome thing to him, a dark and terrible interlocutor. But the man who is in Christ, his life is above the reach of death. When the body crumbles and falls down, to get up no more in this state of things, the soul is a guest in Heaven. A guest ? Nay,—he is a child at Home !

“HANDFULS OF PURPOSE,” FOR ALL GLEANERS.

- I. “*Ye shall be as gods.*”—GEN.
iii. 5.

Tempted to an *upward* fall!

Another instance of *forcing*
destiny.

Man *was* meant to be some-
thing better.

Man must not *know* evil by
creating it.

Men drink that they may be
happy.

Men lie that they may *succeed*.

Beware of temptations to *up-
ward* falls.

-
- II. “*God took him.*”—GEN. v. 24.

What God is *always* doing.

What God has a *right* to do.

Various roads to the end.

Every death a *Divine* act.

God knows when the fruit is
ripe.

Times and ways are *fixed*.

The *fact* of sovereignty proves
the theory.

-
- III. “*The place of the altar, which
he made there at the first.*”

GEN. xiii. 4.

Returning to *first* faiths.

Returning from *iniquity*.

Returning from *scepticism*.

Returning from *indifference*.

Experience teaches what life
needs.

God *awaits* our return (Isa. lv.).

The *Divine* side is right.

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- IV. “*And his sons Isaac and
Ishmael buried him.*”—GEN.

xxv. 9.

Meeting only at *funerals*.

The *separations* of life.

The value of *special* occurrences.

Sometimes *joyous* occasions.

Should always meet in *sorrow*.

Opportunity is a phase of *Pro-
vidence*.

We *might* have met but did not!

-
- V. “*I have learned by experience.*”

GEN. xxx. 27.

The *true* teacher.

The *universal* monitor.

The *indisputable* evidence.

Experience of *sin*,—*pardon*,—
peace.

Character thus becomes argu-
ment.

Let *sin* be subjected to this test.

The Christian triumphant *here*.

Many can answer by *experience*
who cannot answer by *con-
troversy*.

-
- VI. “*And Laban called it Jegar-
Sahadutha, but Jacob called it
Galeed.*”—GEN. xxxi. 47.

Both these words mean the
same thing.

Just what people are doing now.
Different names for the very
same thing!

The difficulty is always in
words.

There is less difference in the
Church than is often supposed.
Evolution and *Providence* may
often be used identically.

Environment and *Circumstances*
are one and the same, in
many uses.

Each man is at liberty to speak
in the language he knows
best.

VII. "*The sun rose upon him.*"
GEN. xxxii. 31.

After an experience of *darkness*.
After a night of *prayer*.

The morning tells what the
night has been.

Blessed are they who can *bear*
the sunlight.

Men may prefer darkness.

The sun *will* rise,—on *what*
shall he rise?

VIII. "*And Esau said, I have
enough, my brother.*"—GEN.
xxxiii. 9.

The first man who ever said so.
What even non-spiritual men
may say.

Should not Christians say more?

Property should be a *heart-store*.

"Enough" can never be true
of *spiritual* blessings.

The evils of avaricious grasping.

We must not be avaricious, even
on the plea that it is for *others*.

Christianity should be proved
by contentment.

Examples of Christ and Paul.

IX. "*Gad, a troop shall overcome
him: but he shall overcome at
the last.*"—GEN. xlix. 19.

Intermediate failures and final
triumphs.

Do not judge until "the last."

Men who are overcome should
be *encouraged*.

Apply this to beginners in
business—in Christian life—in
the reformation of bad
habits.

Apply this to spiritual *doubt*.

Do not too readily describe
men as infidels. Even un-
believers may at *last* believe.

Hope for your *children*.

X. "*And when Joseph's brethren
saw that their father was dead,
they said, Joseph will peradventure
hate us, and will certainly
requite us all the evil which we
did unto him.*"—GEN. l. 15.

The memory of *conscience*.

The powerlessness of mere
time.

The difficulty of self-forgive-
ness.

The difficulty of crediting others
with magnanimity.

They measured Joseph by
themselves.

Joseph's true greatness (v. 19,
20).

Was he not worthy of the
great blessing?

THE PANORAMA OF GENESIS.

ALL books of action, as distinguished from books of thought, admit of being viewed in what may be termed a panoramic way; that is to say, the whole may be so seen as to express the purpose of the book without being distracted by the endless detail; the difference between a panoramic view and a critico-historical view being in some degree the difference between a terrestrial globe and a set of topographical maps. In the latter, a market place may be quite an important feature; in the former, it is utterly without recognition. Such a book as Genesis may be thrown into a panoramic form, so as to impress the memory and affect the heart as no mere detail can ever do. Suppose the whole book to have been read through at once without pause or distraction, what would be the mental condition of the reader? The mind would, for the moment, be stunned by the infinite action. Rest—there has been none. The action has been as the swell and rush of great seas, and the varied noise has blended in its boom, tempests of wind, roars of thunder, and cruel floods. Never book spake like this book. What is the vision? How lies the land of wonder? Son of man, what seest thou? Form rises out of shapelessness; beasts wander over the earth; birds fly in the wide firmament; a man is made, and then a sweet, fair woman, who seems to be himself idealised; a garden—a home all blossoms, a church of leaves, through which, as the soft wind parts them, one can see God. Two men—a murderer, one of them; more men; cities; interchanges, inventions; then dreams, pilgrimages, new outlooks, and covenants which tell that falsehood is possible. Amid all the rush there is a strange quietness; there are men who stay at home to make fields fruitful, and keep the flocks from harm; quiet women, who know every change in the face of the sky, and the temper of every wind that hides its fury in a moan. Yes, sweet scenes on the uplands, in the valleys, and on the edge of the wilderness—homes where peace lives, and prayer opens the upper gate; and

homes of another sort, where jealousy rises before daybreak, where discontent makes every feast a disappointment, and where revenge whets its weapon in secret. So lies the wonderland—so breaks the morning on the awakening earth.

The mind can keep no steady line in the contemplation of this book of wonders. This "beginning" of creation is the burial of ages. The punctuation of the first chapter of Genesis is a punctuation of centuries; say every comma represents ten thousand of our little years, every semicolon a myriad ages, every period a practical eternity. If we had a right sense of *duration*, we should read the Book of Genesis more intelligently. We are the victims of the clocks we have made. We think we have made the "day" as well as the clock, and by our clock we measure God's "evening" and God's "morning." We need, too, to correct our ideas of space as well as our conceptions of time. About space we know nothing. Quantity is a term we cannot define. In the highest imagining Time is impossible, and Space is also impossible, except in relation to other duration and quantity, towards which the relation is only possible, not actual; for whilst an hour may have a relation to a millennium, a millennium can have no relation to an eternity. So we cannot read the first of Genesis at all, excepting in some mumbling manner which leaves out all the music. We should read better, if we had no vexing clock ticking its impertinences in ears that should be filled with the boom of eternity. As for space, let the firmament rebuke us. There is room enough in that roof to make Venus but a diamond and Jupiter a sparkle of amber. Up there, the burning worlds are mere glints of pale fire; there the constellations take up no room; there the created universe is less than nothing beside the majesty of the uncreated God. We must not play the critic in this chapter, for we can neither measure its distance nor handle its materials. Be it history, be it allegory, be it fact in a dream, or a poem framed in fact, we cannot grasp it; we want more light, more time, more space.

So the heavens and the earth are formed, and the host of them set in temporary order. We see, at least, the outline of a universe. What is the universe? Is it but a mighty aggregation of mud, without living relations, and high purposes, and methods full of wisdom and beneficence? Is its movement a hap-chance

whirl which will bring itself to a stop by its own madness, and the star-dancers drop out of rank through sheer giddiness and exhaustion? What is the universe? To me, at present, it is a boundless school, a house of God, a magnificent exemplification of unity, order, harmony, and balance of cause and effect. Its order is sensitive; let but a pin or loop in all the mechanism get out of place, and creation would shudder as if in pain. Behold the blessed, peaceful, unity—no atom out of course, no dew-drop in excess, no shaft of light too luminous, no grass-blade omitted from the great audit, not a sparrow falling without record, the very hairs of our head all numbered! What harmony of movement! What infinite intersection, without rush or noise, collision, or confusion! Star glittering to star as if in cipher of light; thunder and sea utter the same sad melody; night and day but phases of the same majestic Presence. That is the universe outlined in this chapter of Eternity.

Son of man, what seest thou? The vision is now full of mystery. Men are building pillars, and writing strange words upon them; Noah builds an altar on the drenched earth; Abram piles an altar in the plain of Moreh, in the face of the hostile Canaanite; Jacob sets up a pillar near the foot of the dream-ladder—fires are burning, and the Lord is smelling a sweet savour as of an acceptable sacrifice. Yet, amidst all the memorial pillars and altar fires, a marvellous work of deception and varied wickedness never ceases. Men turn from the altar to tell new lies. Men offer the sacrifice with one hand and rob their neighbour with the other. Floods, fires, devastations, all express the righteousness of God and the wickedness of man; yet the Lord will not give up the sinner, and the sinner will not wholly turn away from heaven the expectations which are prayers. The scene is full of confusion. If men would always pray, or if men would always curse, we should have the rest of consistency. But they will not. Cain murders Abel, yet in some way asks the protection of God. Jacob robs Esau, and asks for a blessing. Quite a wonderful thing is this. Is there inconsistency in God? Is he not inconsistent when he permits the wicked man to live? Does he not cease to be God when he ceases to slay the unholy? Nay, did he not uncrown himself when he made a being to whom sin was possible? Did not God himself begin the infinite rebellion?

Thus, so soon, do great questions bring great troubles, and solemn wonders darken into heavy afflictions. A great moral tragedy here sets in. We must not attempt to catch this torrent in the tank of our ignorant wisdom. Let it rush on in its overwhelming fury, and, when it settles into a quiet river, we may ask some questions. Turn to some quieter scene, and say what are those black lines that run through the pages of Genesis? These are the early funerals of the race—Sarah buried in the field of Ephron, in the cave of the field of Machpelah; Rachel buried in the way to Ephrath; Abraham laid to rest by the side of Sarah, in the land of Heth; Jacob going on his last journey, to join Abraham, and Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah, and Leah. So long ago did men die! So soon were graves dug in the earth, and empty places left in the household! Ever since, the funeral march has never ceased. Well-trodden is the road that runs to the grave; a hard path; solid as lead; without a flower in all its weary miles—the road that every human foot must tread. Poor burials they were, too, in that far-away time. Mere burials, solemn farewells! Yet nothing of dignity is wanting, nothing of noble pomp, nothing of ceremonial reverence. But where is the resurrection trumpet? Where the speech of immortality? Where the oath of reunion? Where the flower that cannot fade? Ah me; these are not in Genesis. Grim death is there; separation is there; good-bye is there; but if we would see Immortality we must see him of whom Moses and the prophets did write. “I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me shall never die.” “Death is swallowed up in victory.” But the mid-day of this triumph must be waited for.

We spoke of black lines a moment since. Is there not a cause? What is sin? Is it a wart upon the hand that may be eaten off with sharp acid, or a stain upon the heart not to be touched but by the blood of Christ? Is it a mere mistake, a mischance, a knot or twist in life’s string, which any child may untie or straighten? Is it a little grit on the smooth wheel, which tissue paper well used will remove, or chemist’s oil dissolve and cleanse? What is sin? A stumble, but not a fall? A skin-wound, but not a fatal mischief of the heart? A discord that sets off the harmony, or a thunderbolt that crashes the organ into splinters, and leaves it without shape or tone? “Fools make a

mock at sin." Fools look upon it as a variety of sport. If an enemy can twist the circles of the universe, reverse the order of the seasons, cause the sun to stagger at mid-day, and the moon to totter from the throne of night, that enemy would be sin, and there are fools who would mock the hideous disorder. Who could bear to see the blue heavens churned into foam by the plunging orbs that have been their eternal crown? Fools. What is the universe? Is it an infinite stretch of insensibility? An infinite heartlessness? An infinite vacuity? Then, truly, we may mock its misfortunes and find our laughter in the ghastliness of its ruins. To me the universe is other than this. It is my Father's house; it is a sanctuary; the very life of God runs through it and makes it glad. It is not God, indeed, but an expression of his wisdom and power, his preliminary disclosure and incarnation—the light is his garment, and as for the wings of the wind he walketh upon them. My God is not an infinite Intellect; he is an infinite Heart as well. He feels, he sympathises, he suffers; he is glad in the pureness of our joy; he mourns in the bitterness of our grief. I cannot explain this. But what is there that man can explain? Not the throb of his own heart, not the uplifting of his own hand, not the origin and outgoing of his own thought. For God's fullest answer to sin we must wait further revelation than we have in Genesis. Meanwhile, even there an altar burns: even there blood begins to mean some moral mystery.

So we close this Unbeginning Beginning, or, rather, open this Gate of Wonders. The very name *Genesis* would seem to be inspired. "This beginning of miracles" did the Spirit of God. Other titles may be left to what we call Authorship; *this* is the creation of God. "Beginning" is a word which pledges no date, excludes no sane imagining—a definition without boundaries—not an earth, divided between the gardener and the sexton, but a Sky, a Heaven, an Eternity. P.

"HERE ENDETH THE FIRST LESSON."

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